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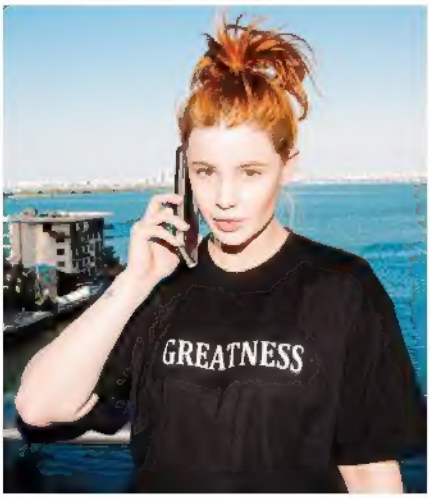
Millicent Hailes
Featuring everyone from Lil Yachty to Amber Rose, Hailes's portfolio reads like a who's who of pop culture. Her glowing, candy-coloured portraits are as fresh and original as her subjects. Capturing the yacht-rock vibe of *Tim & Eric at 10* tested the photographer-director's willpower. "I had to keep leaving the studio because I was laughing too much", she says.



Özgür Yildirim
The Istanbul-based artist provides the smart and cheeky visuals for *Kingsman: The Big Exit*, written by Rob Williams. Our original, exclusive six-page comic from the Millarworld team puts British superspy Eggsy in an adventure you won't see anywhere else. Eggsy will, however, is also on the big screen in *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*.

Brian B Hayes
An internationally renowned photographer whose work is published worldwide. Brian is mostly known for his glamour style photography. With over 25 years of shooting gorgeous models Brian's work has graced the covers of top men's magazines worldwide. Brian also publishes a series of glamour calendars which are best sellers every year. You can find his work at BrianBHayes.com.

RO Kwon
In *Safeword*, her PLAYBOY debut, the American writer casts an unflinching eye on one couple's kink. "Fictional accounts of sadomasochism are often irresponsible", she says. "Sadists are portrayed as traumatised and masochists as abused. I wanted characters who find joy in pain." Kwon's first novel, *Heroics*, is forthcoming from Riverhead.

TC Boyle
In *Subtract One Death*, the 20-time PLAYBOY contributor launches protagonist Riley on an existential roller coaster that, in Boyle's words, "weds high comedy and tragedy in an attempt to get at what life is all about". (Riley has appeared in our pages before: see July/August 2013 issue - USA.) Boyle's *The Relive Box and Other Stories* is out in now.

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Brogues Go Rogue

The ever versatile shoe gets a stylish and unstuffy reboot

Originating on the moors of Scotland and Ireland, the classic brogue has taken on a city-ready footing in a range of smart designer updates this season. This sturdy lace-up gets its name from the distinctive perforations and serrated edges on its surface, called "broguing." Originally a rough-and-tumble work shoe with open, punched holes, brogues allowed water to drain from the feet as labourers tromped around the bogs. Nowadays the perforations are a non-functional detail and often associated with the staid, old-school wingtip. But there's nothing at all stuffy about this offering, ranging from British brand Trickers' heavy-soled Bourton in a versatile merlot to iconic designer Thom Browne's luxury iteration in navy. But Jimmy Choo's Alec (pictured) really caught our eye, with just the right amount of detail and a tonal blue hue that can punch up everything from a slim flannel suit to indigo jeans (all styles available at mrporter.com). *Vincent Boucher*

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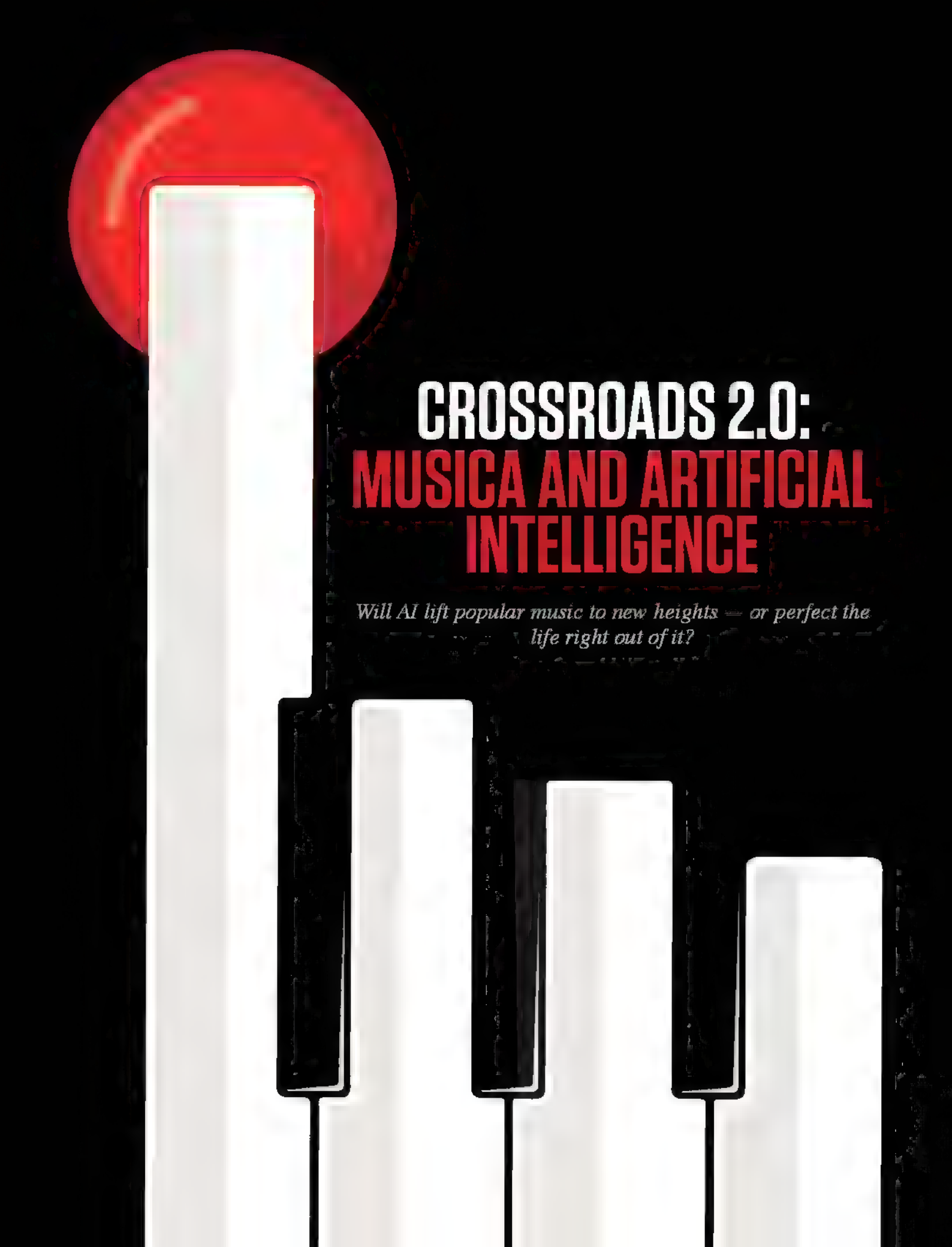

CROSSROADS 2.0: MUSICA AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Will AI lift popular music to new heights — or perfect the life right out of it?

Jesse Engel adjusts his laptop with the fervour of an obsessed conductor riffing through a score. He's tall, mid-30s, with a scruffy beard and dark hair dangling over his shoulders. With his skinny jeans and the kaleidoscopic design on his white T-shirt, he looks more like a touring

By **AARON CARNES**

bassist than a Google research scientist.

We're on the fifth floor of Google's San Francisco office, inside a well-equipped music studio, to learn about Project Magenta, an open-source endeavour that uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to create tools for artists. Magenta offers codes for users to tinker with, including artificial neural networks designed to resemble the neurons of the human brain and pre-trained to perform various tasks. It also offers a community for creative types and techies to share their own experiments.

At a trio of keyboards (the musical kind) sits Douglas Eck, a Senior Staff Research Scientist at Google. Somewhat preppy-looking and 48 years old, he's the guy who conceived of Project Magenta in 2015. It was launched into the public sphere in June 2016.

We're about to have a jam session. This wasn't planned; Eck and Engel were going to demo some software for me and my friend and bandmate Adam Davis. But Eck seems intent on keeping things random. How better to understand Magenta than to jam with it?

I'm behind an electronic drum set. Davis grabs a Fender Strat. Eck sits behind the keys, eager to start playing. On the theremin (an electronic instrument you play by waving your hands over it like a wizard) is Kory Mathewson, a summer intern who spends his free time performing improv comedy with robots. This, Eck tells me with a grin, was a factor in Mathewson's hire.

That leaves one last member of our band: a program called AI Duet, which uses Magenta technology. You play a melody on an attached keyboard, and the program recognises overall patterns based on note selection, rhythm, syncopation and music it has heard previously. It then generates new lines, almost call-and-response style. The in-house version we're using can control the randomness of the response depending on how high you set the "temperature". Engel selects bass guitar for the sound and starts improvising melodies. Once he gets a response he likes, he locks it in. He picks up a black Gibson Les Paul guitar, and the jam begins.

What we come up with is okay, but I'm more impressed with the bass line coming out of AI Duet. If we were an actual band, I'm certain we'd jam with it again. Musicians are often strapped for fresh ideas, and this program seems perfect for spitting out an unending supply of them.

"It's like having another musician in the room", Davis says. He too has a go on Duet. As he settles into the instrument, he starts to colour outside the lines, to the clear delight of our bandmates. ("We're really looking forward to seeing how people break this", Engel says.) He

A typical A.I. Duet session.

cranks the temperature all the way up, producing manic, scary melodies that barely resemble the ones he inputs. He plays "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" just to see what happens. At full temperature, it sounds like a Christmas song having a bad trip.

"Technology is incredibly important for art", Eck says. "Think of strumming this guitar chord with your guitar unplugged. Now plug it into this awesome amp. You rely a lot on technology to get the job done."

What they're doing, he adds, is akin to building a better guitar pedal — even the electric guitar itself. That's the hope, at least. Right now, they're not sure how the technology will impact music or if it will be used as they intend. I'm reminded of Auto-Tune, the recording software whose original function was to correct pitchy vocal tracks for bland pop music, rappers like T-Pain and Kanye West then flipped it on its head, maxing out its properties and creating a strange new sound.

Whatever happens with AI music-generation technology, Eck has a feeling it will be monumental. "We'll follow the musicians", he says. "If someone picks up on something we're doing and does something awesome with it, we'll probably be like, 'Oh, let's do more of that!'"

Listening to Eck, I can tell his brain is geared to geek out on algorithms, but it's a passion for music that guides him to make tools for musicians of all stripes. When I ask him about his own music, I'm surprised to learn he didn't spend his salad days hunched over banks of synthesisers, he shyly tells me of his experiences strumming a guitar at half-full coffee shops.

• • •

The marriage of artificial intelligence and music is not new, nor is the debate over the proper amount of human input. In the 1950s, avant-garde composers Lejaren Hiller and Leonard Isaacson used a computer to write "Illiac Suite". The score consists of statistically generated notes following certain musical principles – harmonic interdependence, for example — according to rules based on the composers' knowledge of traditional music.

Until recently, AI-assisted music stayed primarily in academia. Now Google, Sony, IBM and other companies are getting involved in major research projects. And start-ups like Jukedeck, which uses AI to generate jingles and background music for videos, and Brain.fm, which creates functional AI-generated music (designed to help you relax, focus, sleep, etc), are cashing in on the technology.

The various groups are seeing some similar results, but each has its own agenda. Google is working on tools for artists and designing open-ended, experimental programs with the goal of fuelling creativity. Jukedeck has focused its resources on ease of use, marketing to businesses looking to save money on video soundtracks. Jukedeck co-founder Patrick Stobbs tells me the company hopes to expand its customer base to include anyone who's interested in making music. It wants to use the technology to help would-be musicians write songs without having to learn to play an instrument.

"Much like Instagram has made it easier to create great photographs, we see Jukedeck as a creative tool that lets many more people make music easily, and with more power", he says.

A handful of music software apps using similar AI technology popped up almost a decade ago, with mostly cringe-worthy results. Microsoft's Songsmith generates Casio-keyboard-esque accompaniments to a cappella vocal tracks. The program inspired countless hilarious videos featuring, for example, Freddie

ILLUSTRATION BY NOMA BAR

searing performance of "We Will Rock You" set to what sounds like vaguely Latin Muzak.

Much has changed since then, though technology and taste continue to clash. Last year the world got a glimpse of what AI-generative music will sound like when it rolls out in the near future. Producer Alex Da Kid collaborated with IBM's Watson supercomputer to create the catchy emotional ballad "Not Easy". Watson consumed five years of cultural data, including news headlines, internet searches, movie synopses and social media content, to analyse trends and people's emotions around them. It also processed more than 26 000 recent popular songs to find common themes and musical patterns. Using this information, the supercomputer determined the "emotional fingerprint" of recent history and the musical components that elicited strong emotional responses from listeners. Alex then used this data to choose the theme of heartbreak, as well as musical phrases and lyrical fragments that he liked.

With a Grammy nominee at the helm, the collaboration produced a song intended for as wide an audience as possible. "Not Easy" reached number four on the iTunes Hot Tracks chart within 48 hours while managing to be completely forgettable, save for the story behind it. In trying to take the emotional temperature of millions of people, it seemed to express ... nothing. The Auto-Tune comparison arises again: In the hands of those aiming to perfect popular music, AI technology could very well achieve its ultimate success by digitising the life out of it.

"WE'RE REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING HOW PEOPLE BREAK THIS."

Sony Computer Science Laboratories in Paris, with funding from the European Research Council, began a five-year project creating AI-assisted pop in the summer of 2012. The results are somewhere between "Not Easy" and Magenta. Sony CSL Director François Pachet, a computer scientist and jazz and pop musician, has been involved with music and AI since the 1990s. He and his team have been working more directly with artists than Google has, and their objective — to create innovative pop-based music with indie artists using a set of algorithms called Flow Machines — emphasises output.

One Flow Machines–assisted song, "Daddy's Car", went viral last September. A collaboration with French composer Benoît Carré, it sounds strikingly similar to mid-1960s Beatles — perhaps because for the song's creation, Flow Machines was fed an exclusive diet of Fab Four tracks.

"'Daddy's Car' was a bit like pastiche", says Sony CSL communications officer Fiammetta Ghedini. "It's a style exercise. You have an expectation about what would happen if the Beatles were together again."

Flow Machines' understanding of "style" is data-dependent — meaning you train it on specific music and it predicts the kinds of choices someone composing in that style might make. In other words, it understands the rules of music based solely on the chosen data set and the constraints the programmer sets up. The program gave Carré several Beatles-esque melodies and chord suggestions from which to assemble the song.

To help me understand the artistic potential of Flow Machines, Ghedini directs me to a different, less popular song Carré wrote with the software, called "Mr Shadow". Its data set consisted of 429 songs by "classic American songwriters" including Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Vernon Duke. I listen to it several times in a row; the only description I can give is "unsettling avant pop". The chord sequences are foreboding, the melody simultaneously dreamy and menacing. One YouTuber comments: "Perfect music for when terminators kill humans with Gatling guns in a couple of decades." I don't know if I enjoy the song, but I feel I'm getting a glimpse of a different breed of music, and I want more.

A 2016 Paris concert featuring several artists who have collaborated with Flow Machines, much of it on YouTube, provides that glimpse. The outputs are all artistically fascinating and unique, and vastly more interesting than Alex Da Kid's song. Carré hopes to release an album of his music with Flow Machines later this year. Other artists may follow suit.

Google has been working with artists on a limited level. Eck prefers that his tools be applied to experimental music rather than toward churning out hit singles assembly-line style or producing functional background music, even though those are potentially big markets. (Jukedeck has made great strides toward creating an unlimited library of royalty-free video tracks, which will be good for production budgets but bad for composers.) He hopes to affect the artistic direction of music, and the best way to do that, he believes, is to give tools to cutting-edge artists who may not appeal to mainstream tastes.

"We should be actively trying to make music not everyone likes", Eck tells me. "If it reaches a certain audience, even if it turns off another, that's a win. There's always that novelty effect you get with something new and crazy. Do they come back next week and go, 'Oh, there's another song from that AI. I want to hear that one too?'" Here too pop music provides an analogue: Just as megastars from Madonna to Beyoncé have drawn inspiration from the fringes, so will tomorrow's pop royalty weave the innovations of AI-assisted underground artists into their MOR chart toppers.

Eduardo Reck Miranda, a UK-based professor who's been involved in the field since the mid-1980s, has a special place in his heart for the weird crevices in music that AI can illuminate.

Originally from Brazil, Miranda was a composer first but was drawn to the technology as a means to get his music performed. His enthusiasm for the topic is infectious. He tells me about his composition "Symphony of Minds Listening", for which he developed AI software to remix Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, using brain scans to deconstruct how people listen to the music.

"Can machines actually do it? That was the question we were asking", he says. "But then, when we realised machines can actually do it, and look at how boring the music is, the question shifted. How can those machines do something useful?"

Much of the technology at the root of this debate predates Miranda's, Eck's and Pachet's experiments. And much of the credit for that technology belongs to David Cope — a modern-day mystic and a man who may understand the relationship between AI and the creative brain better than anyone else.

• • •

For some 30 years, Cope was a faculty member at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Now 76, the soft-spoken ex-professor continues to compose music and pursue other artistic endeavours, mostly using AI.

As I walk up the stairs inside Cope's cosy Santa Cruz home, he issues a warning: "Get ready

for a real wacko moment in your life." Without further explanation, he opens his office door to reveal a room that, in direct contrast to the rest of the house, is in total disarray. Hanging from the ceiling are dozens of wind chimes. Books and random objects are tossed about everywhere, as though they've just survived a tornado. In the centre of the room is an exercise bike.

The chaos, he tells me, is intentional. It enables him to look at any two objects and try to find a relationship between them. Just as his software is for music generation, the disorder is a creative prompt that uses the surprising power of randomness. It says a lot about the fundamentals of how this all works.

Cope has been writing algorithms since he was a teenager. He has penned approximately 100 books, with sections on computer-generated music showing up as early as 1977. In 1980 he began a long-term project called Experiments in Music Intelligence, later shortened to EMI and then to Emmy to avoid copyright issues with the record label. He started developing a new program, Emily Howell, in the 1990s. He doesn't usually admit this, but he gave it a human name in part to goad the naysayers who claim machines will put human composers out of work. He allows himself a little laugh at that. "They do what we tell them to do", he says. "They have no self-awareness. They have no consciousness. I define AI as the study of using computers to understand the human brain and how it works. That's all it is."

He asks me to consider what composers do when they write. I'm not sure.

"We steal", he says. "Meaning that the most important part of your algorithm isn't an algorithm at all. It's a bunch of music." I interpret this as the patchwork of melodies, moods and styles that artists stitch together in the process of making their own work. Cope realised that computers needed to operate the same way.

In 1988 he created a dataset using hundreds of examples of his own music. Within approximately 24 hours, Emmy had composed "Cradle Falling", which Cope maintains is one of the best pieces of music he's written. Listening to this composition and other Emmy selections, he says, proved his theory that composers steal. "It brought out things I didn't realise were so explicit in my music, which is those composers who affect me most."

I recognise that what Google and Sony are doing with deep learning is a direct extension of Cope's data-dependent approach. Miranda agrees, but he adds that the approach is incomplete, which is in part why his creative process has always been experimental.

"A single piece of AI software is not able to fully embody how we make music", Miranda says. "The best we can do is to narrow the problem to specific aspects."

Which leads to another confounding quirk inherent in creative generative models: AI music has no clear metric of success. Language translation software has made huge leaps in recent years because of machine-learning technology. We can all agree on how successful it is because the results are objective. But how do we agree on the value of music produced by AI software — chart success? Grassroots popularity? Critical acclaim? Eck and his team at Google define it by sustained interest from artists. When musicians continue to use these tools after the initial novelty wears off because they believe the results they're getting are good — regardless of what audiences think — that's when AI will take its permanent place in the vast, cluttered kingdom of music.

• • •

After we leave Google, Davis and I discuss the experience. "I liked seeing the edge of where things start to break down", he says. "At certain points it would go off the rails. It wouldn't know what to do from the information it was given. That created really interesting music."

Jason Freidenfelds, a Senior Communications Manager at Google, believes that AI's impact in music will exceed any one technological advancement.

"It may be as big a deal as the original shift from people making music primarily with their own bodies to crafting instruments that had their own unique properties and sounds", he says. "AI may rival that leap from simple objects to complex instruments. Now the instruments themselves will have intelligence. They won't just produce unique sounds but unique ideas for new timbres or melodies that musicians can then riff on."

Later, Freidenfelds sends me two new Magenta-generated piano tracks, made with no human input whatsoever. Their complexity and nuance shock me.

Many artists and music fans are legitimately scared that AI technology will put honest folks out of work while dragging creativity to the lowest common denominator. But Davis's urge to mess with the tools and find the cracks is exactly what innovators like Eck, Engel, Miranda and Pachet are counting on. Computers, after all, make errors, just like us. And the weird, imperfect and unpredictable human instinct is the engine that will give AI the power to redefine music. ■

MAISA
KEHL

Maisa was born in a small town in Brazil on May 18 1978. It was clear that even as a small child she had a big heart with a big mission in her early years. Maisa was quickly identified as being bold, fearless, creative and highly self motivated. Those qualities quickly lead her to training for competing in and winning pageants at the young age of 10. Among this she also became a skilled dancer in ballet, jazz, samba and salsa. She participated consistently in pageants and modeling well into her high school years. In addition to having a successful career in the modeling industry at such a young age by 2002 she was running a profitable HMoA business alongside her parents. Maisa also chose to pursue higher education during that time moving to the USA studying International Business and earning an Associate of Arts in English degree. With her education and skill set she became a powerful marketer and excelled in the Finance and Mortgage industry. After college even though she was successful in her business career her heart was still calling for more and Maisa picked up modeling again. She was done living a life that others told her was 'safe' and she took the leap into pursuing her dreams. Maisa is currently a well recognised international model booked frequently for print, commercial, promotional, video and hosting work. Among some of the highlights have been on screen appearances with companies like Warner Brothers (Snatchers) and Sundance (Creatures of Whitechapel). Additionally she's graced the Glamor Model Magazine, Eve Magazine, Daily Sport UK Magazine, Dream Vixens Magazine, Behind the Shutter and Gladys Magazine among several others. Amidst all of these projects and creations she's also been active in pageants and has carried titles such as Miss Brazil International Bikini 2016. Although her list of accomplishments runs long, some of the things she's most proud of don't include a sash or a magazine cover or an appearance on the screen. Maisa's greatest accomplishment is being known as a woman who is actively promoting and reminding women that it's okay to love and honour themselves fully including the sensual side that a lot of people fear, shame and judge. She's known for taking a bold stand not only through her words but through the way she conducts herself in every moment and by the way she represents each sash title and company she collaborates with. And through her example she's touched the hearts and minds of the masses. And is shifting the limiting belief systems and mindsets in this industry and around the world.

My hobbies and interests
When I'm not modeling I love to go hiking, boating, spend time with friends, have good conversations over an intimate dinner and a glass of wine or simply chill at home with my doggy, catching up on my reading.

My goals and career ambitions
This past year has been amazing. I have been far busier than I ever was in the previous years and I have gotten to be a part of so many amazing opportunities in such a short period of time (Miss Brazil Bikini International, International Bikini Model Search etc). In 2018 I want to work even more and consistently will work even harder with promoting my endeavours via social media and everyday life. I want to shamelessly promote with purpose and intent, I am my own business after all. And for the future, my goal is to eventually consult in the industry. I would be honoured to share my network and knowledge with the future generation.

Who inspires me
My parents who have always been my biggest cheerleaders and support.

My favourite quote
"A woman who walks in purpose doesn't have to chase people or opportunities. Her light causes people and opportunities to pursue her." Dr Farrah Gray

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Insecurity, laziness, cockiness, bad manners or bad hygiene

The perfect date
Don't get me wrong I love some champagne, satin sheets and chocolate covered strawberries but I will never skip the chance to enjoy a date with a delicious green juice sitting on a warm beach in a comfy bikini having a good conversation.

My girl crush
Gisele Bundchen. She's the last true supermodel and a Brazilian how could you not love her?

My favourite food
Sushi

My biggest fear
My greatest fear is to live a life not being true to myself.

One destination I'd love to visit
Greece

I'm not embarrassed to say
That I love good food, luxury and sexual pleasures.

Want to see more of Maisa? Then you can follow her on Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook @maisakehl

OCTOBER 2012

NOVEMBER 2017

NOVEMBER 2017

Future-Proof Your Headphones

The audio jack may disappear, so get ready with next gen Bluetooth versions

Like it or not, our old friend the headphone jack is going the way of the VCR. The only hole on the new Moto Z is a charging port. This is actually good news for audiophiles, connecting via Lightning (Apple) or USB (everyone else) means that headphones can include onboard amplifiers and deliver higher-quality sound. The rest of us get slightly thinner cellphones and another item on our shopping list. But there's a way out: The phone gods aren't taking Bluetooth away. Going wireless now will keep the music playing in the future. Here are our favourite headphones that allow you to unplug. *Corinne Iozzio*

PHIATON BT 460

While it was busy cutting cords, Phaton also did away with buttons. The BT 460 over-ears include a touch-sensitive pad on the ear cup from which you can adjust volume and skip tracks. The headphones also automatically pause when you take them off your melon. If you and a friend each buy a pair, both sets of headphones can connect to share the same audio feed.

SENNHEISER PXC 550

The crowning glory of Sennheiser's newest cans is their ability to shut out the world around you. The headphones use active noise cancelling, which listens to the din of a room and generates opposing sound waves to nix it, so you'll hear only your music. Need to hear an announcement or listen to the boss rant for a second? Tap the touch-sensitive pad on the right ear cup to start and stop your tunes.

MASTER & DYNAMIC MW60 WIRELESS OVEREAR HEADPHONES

No matter how gorgeous a pair of headphones [illegible] and the MW60's underlably beautiful. Bluetooth audio can turn into

a bummer the second it shudders, skips or drops out. So rather than waste its whopping 45-millimetre drivers, Master & Dynamic focused on the MW60's antennae, borrowing the exposed design from Apple. The result is a clear signal that travels up to 15 metres, even with drywall and doors in the way.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTTIE CAMERON

YEVGENIYA
Pechlaner
ALEKSEJ KULESH • ANASTASIYA KRI
FRANZ PECHLANER
NOVEMBER 2017

LAS
VEGAS

About me
When was 16 visited a modeling school There learned how to do my own make up walk on high heels pose in front of the camera and dance like to be positive and happy acting from my heart and believe can reach my goals Also am a very big Playboy fan and a globetrotter

love my family and believe in magic in the future would like to write a book about positive thinking and living to motivate people especially women around the world on my own experience Vegas is my favourite place on the earth Other places love to spend my time are Los Angeles Paris and New York

My hobbies and interests
Drawing photography and interior design So im thinking about painting beautiful pictures in the future and also id would be happy to have an opportunity to take part in designing a hotel like to travel and learn about new and different cultures

My goals and career ambitions
would like to write a book about positive thinking and living Also would like to write an autobiography to motivate people especially women around the world on my own experiences For six years my family and have been supporting poor children all over the world This why 'm dreaming about starting my own charity organisation for kids who need financial help or at least to build a school for children wherever it sneeded in the near future you can see a little bit more about my private life as a person on the new reality TV online channel named Seta TV know that many fans of mine all over the world are waiting for the chance to take a look at my everyday life So this is a very good opportunity for me to show my fans how live what do during the day where travel with my family or party with my Playmate sisters You can find me there under the following link seta tv/playmate

Who inspires me
Definitely Pamela Anderson In January 2016 was lucky enough to party with the legendary Playboy model She is an amazing good looking woman a kind person with a big heart and beautiful soul We drank champagne were talking and took some pictures together it was an unforgettable moment in my life One month later my Playmate pictorial was published in Playboy Czech edition where amazing Pamela was on the cover of the same issue it was really a big surprise for me The next very big dream of mine is to have a photoshoot together with my idol Pamela Anderson

My favourite quote
"Life is too short to live somebody else's dream" Hugh Hefner

My favourite food
like to try different food love pizza pasta sushi and everything with cheese

Turn on
like good red wine sex with the man love cold coffee traveling all around the world learning new things dancing in the rain and wearing sexy clothes and lingerie love shoes especially high heels erotic photos chocolate and spicy food and fast cars Sport is also very important for me like yoga Pilates tennis and golf

Turn off
don't like narrow minded people all kinds of negativity to sleep alone and to freeze

One destination I would love to visit
Of course South Africa have never been and 'm excited about visiting this beautiful country with its variety of beauty

My biggest fear
To swim in open water

If I could change anything it would be
would love to see world peace and harmony no wars and only people who accept and support each other Open minded people with respect for one another's different cultures or nationalities In my life, wouldn't change anything, because all my life experiences have made me the person am today

Want to see more of Yevgeniya? Then follow her on Instagram @yevgeniya_pechlaner on Twitter @YPechlaner or on Facebook at Yevgeniya Pechlaner

Bra: 34D

Subtract One Death

by TC Boyle

When life sets you adrift, sometimes the best course is to jump ship

Riley didn't like dogs, or not particularly. They were like children (of which he had none, thankfully), bringing dirt, confusion and unlooked-for expense into your life. But here was a dog, a darting, elaborately whiskered thing in the 30 to 36-kilogram range with a walleye and one collapsed ear, barking inquisitively at him from the terminus of its chain. Behind him, in the drive, Caroline stuck her head out the car window, her face leached of colour. "Don't tell me this is the place?"

"Wait'll you see inside", he called over his shoulder, the dog's explosive barks underscoring the dreariness of the day, which was grey and coldish for mid-May.

He'd rented the house for a week because the few local hotels had been booked for graduation across the river at West Point and he most emphatically did not want to go down into the city, which was what Caroline most emphatically did want but wasn't going to get. He hated cities. Hated the seethe of people, the noise, the crush of everybody wanting everything at the same time. What he liked was this, simplicity, nature, the river spread out at his feet and his gaze carrying all the way across to the wooded mountains on the other side, which, apart from the rail line — and what was that, an oil tank? — couldn't have looked all that much different when Henry Hudson first laid eyes on them. He felt his heart lift. All was right with the world. Except for the dog. And Caroline.

But Caroline liked dogs, and she was out of the car now, striding across the wet lawn in her heels, calling to the dog in a clucking, high childish voice. "Oh, that's a good boy; he's a good boy, isn't he? What a good boy", she called until she was right there and the dog was fawning at her feet, rolling over on its back so she could apply her expensive manicure to its underbelly. After a minute of this — and Riley was just standing there watching, not with the proprietary pride he'd felt after their marriage four years ago but with a vague kind of quotidian interest, the same interest, dulled and flattened, that just barely got him out of bed in the mornings — she turned round to him and said, girlishly, sweetly, "This must be Meg and

ILLUSTRATION BY MARC ASPINALL

Brian's new dog. I wonder why they didn't say anything? I mean, I remember the old one, when they came to visit that time? The one that died — I'm picturing German shepherd, right? Wasn't it a German shepherd?"

He just shrugged. One dog was the same as another as far as he was concerned. Meg had said she'd be home from work by four to give him the keys to the rental, which belonged to her next-door neighbours, an older couple who were away in Tuscany for the month on some sort of culinary tour. But it was already half-past four, there were no cars in Meg's driveway, and her house — a modest one-story place shingled in grey that had had its basement flooded twice in the past year after storms upriver — looked abandoned. Except for the dog, that is, which was clearly Meg's, since its chain was affixed to a stake on her side of the rolling expanse of lawn the two properties shared. If Meg was home — or Brian — the dog would have been in the house.

"Give her a call, why don't you?" he said, and watched Caroline straighten up and dig in her purse for her phone. He didn't carry a cell phone himself — one, because he despised technology and the grip it had on the jugular of America, and two, because he didn't want the federal stooges mapping his every move. Might as well have them attach one of those tracking devices. Like with wolves — or parolees. Or better yet, just tattoo your social security number across your forehead.

Caroline, slim still, with gym-toned legs tapering down to those glistening black patent-leather heels, had turned her back to him, as if for privacy, the phone pressed to her ear. It was a picture, her standing there framed against the river like that, and he would have snapped a photo too — if he had a cell phone. But then what was the use of pictures anyway? Nobody would ever see them. It wasn't like the old days, when he was a kid and Polaroid was king. Then you could snap a picture, hold it in your hand, put it in a photo album. Today? All the photos were in the Cloud, ready for the NSA to download at their leisure. And pleasure.

Leisure and pleasure. He liked the sound of that and made a little chant of it while he waited for Caroline to turn round and tell him Meg wasn't answering, or Brian either.

It began to drizzle. This had the effect of intensifying the other worldly greenness of the place, and he liked that, liked the weather, liked the scene, but the shoulders of his new sports coat seemed strangely sponge-like, and his coiffure — the modified pompadour he still affected — was threatening to collapse across his forehead. He let out a curse. "What now?" he said. "Jesus. She *did* say four, didn't she?"

There was something in his tone that got the dog barking again, which drove a fresh stake through his mood. He was about to swing round, get back in the car and go look for a bar somewhere when Meg's generic little silver car swished into the drive next door and he moved toward her, foolishly, because that put him in range of the dog, which reared up on its hind legs to rapturously smear mud all over his white linen pants and attempt to trip him in the process. "Shit", he cursed, shoving the dog down and trying vainly to wipe away the mud, a good portion of which transferred itself to his hands. But was it mud — or the very element he'd just named?

No matter. So what if his jacket was soaked, his pants ruined and dirt of whatever denomination worked up under his fingernails? He wasn't here to show off his fashion sense or dine out with celebrities or sit for press interviews. No, Lester was dead. And he was here for the funeral.

• • •

One thing, among many, that Caroline didn't know was that he'd been involved with Meg all those years ago, long before he met her — or either of his first two wives, for that matter — but if she did, he suspected she wouldn't have cared much one way or the other, except to drop the knowledge like a fragmentation device into the middle of one of their increasingly bitter squabbles, squabbles over nothing. Like whose turn it was to empty the litter box and why they needed a litter box in the first place when the cats could just shit outside, but no, she insisted, that was the kind of thinking that was driving birds to extinction and how could he be so short-sighted, and he, in his short-sightedness, countering with *What birds? There's nothing but crows out there. Crows and more crows.* And she: *My point exactly.* Or who'd conveniently forgotten to fill up the car or buy cheese at the market, and not blue cheese, which tasted like hand soap, but a nice Gruyère or Emmentaler? Or how you pronounced her brother Cary's name, which he rendered as "Carry" and she as "Kiene" in her Buffalese.

And what was that all about? Boredom, he supposed, the two of them locked away in their restored 18th-century farmhouse in the midst of a peace so unshakable it was like living in a tomb. Which was all right with him — he was a novelist, "high mid-list", as he liked to say, bitterly, and he'd chosen to isolate himself for the sake of his writing — but after the remodel was done and she'd selected the antiques and the rugs and the fire-irons and dug her flower beds and landscaped the front portion of their six-point-five acres, what was left for her? You choose rural, you choose isolation. And Caroline didn't especially like isolation.

But none of that mattered now because

He was sprawled right down to the soles of his

Lester was dead and Meg was crossing the lawn to him, her eyes already full. Before he could think, he was wrapping her in a full-body embrace that rocked them in each other's orbit far too long while Caroline stood there watching and the mud staining his trousers imperceptibly worked itself into Meg's jeans. He was feeling sorrow, a sorrow so fluent it swept him in over his head, Lester gone and Meg pressed tight to him, and it really hadn't come home to him till now because now he was here, now it was real. He'd always suppressed his emotions in the service of cool, of being cool and detached and untouchable, but suddenly there were tears in his eyes. He might have stood there forever, clutching Meg to him, so far gone he couldn't think beyond the three questions he and Lester used to put to each other when they were stoned (*Who are we? Where are we? Why are we?*), but for the fact that Brian's car had somehow appeared in the drive, right behind Meg's. If Caroline didn't know how he'd once felt about Meg, Brian certainly did, and the knowledge of that — and of some of the extracurricular things Brian had said to him at a party a few years ago — made him come back to himself.

He became aware of the rain, which was

more persistent now. Lester's face rose up suddenly in his consciousness, then melted away, as if he'd taken a match to a photograph. He let go of Meg, dropped his arms to his sides, took a step back. "Hi, Brian", he called, lifting one hand in a crippled, fluttering wave though Brian couldn't have heard him since the window was rolled up and the motor running. Still, he couldn't help adding, "Great to see you!"

• • •

The house was one of 12 set on a slim strip of land between the river and the train tracks, a smallish 1940s bungalow that had been recast as a two-story contemporary, with fireplace, boat mooring and panoptic views of the river. It was nothing like the farmhouse, of course, but once you stepped inside it gave a good first impression: rustic furniture, framed photos of Hudson scenes on the walls, a brass telescope for stargazing or catching the eye-gleam of the tugboat captains who pushed barges up and down the river all day long. The second impression was maybe a hair less favourable (cramped kitchen, a smell of what, bilge?), but he was gratified — and relieved — to see that Caroline was going to be all right with it. "I love the view", she said, striding across the parquet floor to pull the curtains open wide. "It's" — she searched for the word, turning to him and holding out her hands. If he thought she was going to say "inspiring" or "sublime" or even "awesome", he was disappointed. "It's nice", she said, and then clarified — "I mean it works, right?"

They were just mixing their inaugural cocktail — vodka gimlet, Lester's touchstone — when the first train entered the scene. On a theoretical level, Riley had understood that the proximity of the tracks might give rise to a certain degree of noise now and again, but this was something else altogether. There was a sudden shattering blast, as of a jet fighter obliterating the sound barrier, then the roar of the wheels, the insult of the horn and the chattered-teeth rattle of every glass, cup, dish and saucer in the cupboard. The whole thing, beginning to end, couldn't have lasted more than 10 seconds, but it managed to spike his blood pressure and induce him to slosh Rose's lime juice all over the granite countertop the older couple had installed to fortify their barely adequate kitchen.

"Jesus", he said, "what was that?"

Caroline, deadpan. "The train."

"How're we supposed to sleep? I mean, what's the schedule? Are there night trains — or no, there wouldn't be, right?"

"Ask Meg and Brian."

"You get used to it, is that what you're saying?"

She shrugged. Implicit in that shrug and the tight smile that accompanied it was the reminder that they wouldn't have been having this discussion if they were on the 12th floor of the Algonquin or even the Royalton or Sofitel and that any train they might have run across would have been a conveyance, only that, a means of getting them from the city to this benighted place and back again.

"Jesus", he repeated, looking around for the paper towels, and he was just sopping up the mess — sticky, redolent, probably 90 percent sugar — when there was a tap at the sliding door and Meg was there, framed in the glass panel as in a Renaissance painting, *Our Lady of the River*. She'd changed out of her jeans and into a skirt and she'd done something with her hair. He waved, enjoying the moment, till Brian's head and shoulders entered the frame and then, at hip level, the dog. She tapped again, grinning, and held up a handle of vodka.

They had a round of gimlets in memory of Lester, then another, after which they switched to wine, a Bordeaux from the case Riley had brought down from Buffalo to help ease Lester's passage, or at least his own immersion in it. He'd written about death to the point of obsession, but he'd been spared the experience of it, if you except the death of his parents, which had happened so long ago he couldn't even remember what they looked like, and he was finding the process of mourning in someone else's living room increasingly disorienting. He tried to make small talk, but small talk wasn't going to work, not with Lester hanging over them like some great-winged bird. The shadows deepened. The river went the colour of steel. Everything he said seemed to begin with "You remember when?" And here were Meg's eyes, inviting him right in, the most patient, salvatory eyes he'd ever seen. He was drunk, of course, that was it, and if Caroline and Brian were forced to hover on the fringes of the conversation, that was something they'd just have to get used to because they hadn't been there with Lester right from the beginning and he had. And Meg had too.

"You're slurring your words", Caroline said at one point, and he looked up, wondering how it had gotten dark so quickly — and without his noticing.

"Maybe we should eat something?" he heard himself say, even as the lights of a barge drifted by on the dark shoulders of the river and the dog, agitated by something beyond the range of human senses, began to whine.

Brian pushed himself up from the easy chair in the corner, an empty wine glass in one hand. He was big-headed, white-haired and, Riley noted with a certain degree of satisfaction, he'd begun to develop a potbelly. He looked old, tired, bored. "I'm ready for bed."

Jesus. Did the trains run past the house, like this?

"Pizza?" Meg made a question of it. "They'll deliver."

"Count me out", Brian said, and gave a little laugh that was meant to be self-deprecating but to Riley's ears sounded just this side of rude. He was a killjoy, Brian. A non-entity. And Meg was wasted on him. "But if you three want" — Brian waved at the air — "I mean, go ahead."

"I don't eat pizza", Caroline put in, her voice light and incisive, no slurring for her though she'd had as much to drink as anybody. She let out a laugh. "It's not Paleo."

"You're telling me they didn't have pizza delivery in the Stone Age?" Riley had used the joke before, somewhere, sometime, and nobody responded to it now. He was sunk deep in the easy chair beside Brian's, feeling as if he'd never summon the volition to move again. Somehow he found the dog's head in his lap, and he began idly stroking its collapsed ear.

"We could go out", Meg offered, but Caroline just shook her head and he sank deeper into the chair, wondering how he was even going to get up the stairs to bed, let alone negotiate the car and deal with lights, people, waiters, menus.

Just then there was a tap at the glass, which sent the dog into a frenzy, its head rocketing up

out of Riley's lap, paws scrabbling on the floor, the barking rising in pitch till it was nearly a scream, and Riley looked up to see a ghostly face illuminated there at the door, a woman's face, nobody he knew, but it made his heart seize all the same.

As it turned out, she was Meg's neighbour from the next house up and she had some bad news to impart, some very bad news, in fact. Meg slid the door back and the funk of the river rushed in to overwhelm him. "Turn on the TV!" the woman shouted, thumping into the room and going directly to the television — a wall-mounted thing Riley hadn't to this point even noticed — and clicked it on. "I can't believe it", she sang out as images of wreckage, flames, emergency flares and stunned onlookers played across the screen in a way that had become the nightly reality and every bit as believable as anything else out there in the world. The feed at the foot of the screen read *Florence, Italy*, and gave the time there, *5:30AM*. "They got Ted", she said.

So there were two deaths. First Lester, and now this. Ted Marchant. Whose name Riley must have written across the face of a check, though he had no recollection of it, who'd sat in this very chair and trained his telescope on the stars or maybe a girl going topless in a speedboat on the far side of the river, who, as it would turn out, had been unlucky enough to be sitting at a corner table in a Florentine café, sipping his espresso, at the very moment the black-clad gunmen had rumbled up on their stolen Ducatis and begun shooting. He'd never met Ted Marchant or his wife of 45 years either — Nadine — but here he was in possession of the dead man's home and all the dead man's things, drinking out of the dead man's wine glasses. It made him queasy to know it.

The television talked to them and they leaned forward in their chairs and watched the images play across the dead man's screen, listened to the voices of the reporters, the same old thing, the tiredest thing, except that one of the 17 dead said. And that makes this whole thing so, I don't know, *spooky*, I guess you'd have to say."

He didn't deny it. In fact, he was spooked right down to the superstitious God-denying soles of his feet. It was like that time in Alaska when the surviving pilot of a two-man air service told him his partner had crashed while delivering a family of Inuit to the next village for the funeral of a family of Inuit killed in an air crash the previous day. Was that how the fates were aligned? Did death come in pairs, like twins? Lester had died of melanoma, a cruel, preposterous thing that had begun as a blister on the little toe of his right foot and spread to his brain and killed him so fast Riley hadn't even known he was sick, let alone dying. It wasn't cool to die, wasn't hip, that was how Lester felt — he had an image to maintain — and so he'd done it alone. That was what hurt. He hadn't called, e-mailed, written, hadn't breathed a word. He'd just crawled off to some hospice in California and spared them the pain.

His heart shrinking at his pillow. Riley grew hot

Meg gave her a look of disbelief. "What are you talking about? *Who?*"

"The *terrorists*. I just had a call from Nadine." And here her voice broke. "It was, I don't know, wrong place, wrong time." She was 50-ish, this woman, bottom-heavy, her hair cut short but for a spray of pink-dyed strands sprouting like feathers at the back of her neck. "She's going to be okay, but Ted — he didn't make it."

Loudly, in a rising wail, Meg denied it.

"Who's Ted?" he asked, puzzled, even as the tension began to sink its claws in his stomach, deep down, where he was most vulnerable.

"Ted Marchant", Meg said without turning her head. "I can't believe it", she echoed, her eyes jumping from the screen to the woman who'd come to destroy their evening. Or night. It was night now. Definitely. "When?" she demanded. "Are you sure?"

"Who's Ted Marchant?"

Brian loomed over him with his big white head, the empty glass arrested in mid-air. "The guy", he said flatly, "whose chair you're sitting in."

• • •

had plodded across these floors and breathed this same dank river air that smelled of a whole array of deaths, from fish to worms to clams and the algae that bloomed on a bounty of phosphates and died back to nothing again. It was staggering. He almost wanted to protest — this wasn't about Ted Marchant, whom he didn't even know; it was about Lester — but instead, into the void, he said, "Maybe we should leave?"

Meg turned away from the screen, her features saturated with the garish light, and looked him full in the face. "No", she said, fierce suddenly, as if the killers were in the room with them. "No way. You're going to stay."

He glanced at Caroline for support, but Caroline's eyes never left the screen. "But won't the wife? She'll be coming back now, she'll have to, the widow, I mean."

"Are you serious? Something like this — it could be weeks, months, who knows." Meg's voice caught in her throat. "Poor Nadine — can you imagine?"

"The weirdest thing" — and here the woman who'd brought the news gave him a long look — "is that you're here, for a funeral, right?" A glance for Meg. "Or that's what Meg said."

Later, after Caroline had gone up to bed and Brian took the dog back across the lawn to his own house and shut out the lights one by one till the fading image of it vanished into the night, there were just the three of them left there in the dead man's living room. Everything was quiet, the lights muted, the TV screen gone blank now. He was the one who'd finally gotten up and shut it off, Meg whispering "Thank you" and the other woman (her name was Anna or Anne or maybe Joanne, he never quite caught it, not that it mattered — she was the Messenger of Death and that was all he needed to know) seconded her. "These media hyenas", she said, waving her hand in dismissal. "Really, it's just disgusting." For a long while no one said anything, the only sounds the tap of bottle on glass and the consolatory splash of the wine, but then the house began to quail and rattle and here came the blast again, that violent rending of the air, and a train hurtled past with a last fading shriek.

"Oh my God, I didn't realise it was so late", the woman said, rising from her chair and setting her glass down on the nearest horizontal surface — an inlaid end table, already blemished with a dozen fading circular scars, not

that Ted Marchant was going to care. In the next moment she was embracing Meg, the two of them tearful, exuberant in their grief, and then the woman was gone and he was alone with Meg. She looked at him and shook her head.

"It's terrible, isn't it?"

He didn't know what to say. It was. Of course it was. Everything was terrible — and getting worse.

He watched her as she bent for her glass, stood up and drained it, one hand on her hip. She looked dazed, uncertain on her feet, and she set the glass down carefully beside the one her neighbour had left, then sank heavily into the couch. "Here", she said, giving him a tired smile, "sit here beside me. Take a load off. It's been a day."

So he sat beside her and felt the warmth of her there in the house that had taken on a chill with the lateness of the hour, and then he put his arm around her and pulled her to him and they kissed and though he felt the tug of her like some elemental force of reconciliation and surcease, he didn't give in to it. What he did do, with the smallest adjustment, was stretch out his legs and lay his head in her lap so that the warmth became a heat and his eyes fell shut, and the death, the two deaths, faded into oblivion.

• • •

The next morning, Caroline, declaring the situation "too weird for words", took a train into the city to lunch with her roommate from college and engage in a little resuscitative shopping, and by the time he extracted himself from the bed he'd somehow managed to find his way to at some unfathomable hour of the night, he was just in time to see Meg pulling out of the driveway on her way to work. Brian's car was gone too, as was his own — Caroline had taken it up to the Garrison station and left it there because he was too enfeebled by the night's reversals to get up and drop her off. So he was alone there in the dead man's house (the *murdered* man's house) poking through the cupboards with the idea of coffee in mind — and maybe something to ease his stomach, like dry toast. Or . . . the zwieback he somehow found in his hand, the pastel rendering of a baby grinning up at him from the front of the cardboard box. But why would the old couple stock baby crackers? Grandchildren? Dental issues? He put a zwieback in his mouth, experimentally, then spat it back out in the palm of his hand. Milk. Maybe milk would settle his stomach. He poured out a clean white glass of it, set it on the counter and stared at it a long moment before trying, with mixed success, to pour it back into the carton. In his distraction, it must have taken him five entire minutes before he remembered that Lester was dead. And that the funeral, at which he'd be expected to get himself together long enough to deliver a eulogy, was tomorrow.

He looked up at a sudden noise — a thump — and there was the dog, pressing its nose to the glass of the sliding door, a ruptured length of chain trailing away from its throat like essential jewellery. The day was bright, he noticed now, yesterday's clouds and drizzle driven back over the hills and the sun dividing the lawn like a chessboard into patches of shadow and light, and the irritation he would normally have felt at the intrusion gave way to something lighter, more tenable, something almost like acceptance. He was glad Caroline had gone into the city and Meg to work, glad to be alone here so he could slow things down, take a walk, sit by the river, commune with Lester on his own terms, and never mind Ted Marchant — Ted Marchant was another issue altogether and he wasn't going to go there.

The thump came again. The dog was pawing the glass as if it wanted something, as if it had a message to convey, some extrasensory glimpse into the process that had claimed Lester and Ted Marchant and would repurpose itself, in good time, to claim the survivors too. Or maybe it was just hungry, maybe that was it. Or, more likely, it wanted in so it could go take a crap on the carpet — wasn't that what dogs were famous for? But then it occurred to him that the dog shouldn't be there at all, that it had, in fact, broken free of its chain, which meant that it was in danger, or potential danger — hadn't Meg complained about how vigilant you had to be or it would bolt out the door and make straight for the train tracks? He got up from where he was sitting at the kitchen table, thinking to let the dog in — to trap it in the house — and then see if he could do something about reinforcing the chain.

But what was the thing's name? Something with a T — Tuffy? Terry? Or no, Taffy, that was it, because of its colouration, as Meg had explained shortly after it had annihilated his pants. Anyway, he got up from the kitchen table, went to the door and slid it open, which, far from having the desired effect, caused the dog to back away from him so precipitately it fell from the porch in an awkward scramble of limbs. For the briefest moment it lay there on its back, its legs kicking in the air, and then it sprang up and bolted headlong away from him, straight in the direction of the tracks. "Taffy!" he called, feeling ridiculous but nonetheless coming down off the porch and hustling across the lawn after him (or her, he wasn't even sure what sex the thing was). "Taffy! No!"

It was at that moment the train appeared, the

The train was just as the dog ever trapped by.

9:50 or 10:10 or whatever it was, the air shrieking, the wheels thundering, a great onrushing force that eclipsed the animal as if it had never been there at all. Running now, his heart slamming at his ribs, Riley reached the tracks just as the last car — *the caboose*, a term that came to him out of a buried past, childhood, Lionel, mittens pressed to ears, *Take Daddy's hand now* — raged on by and the tracks stood vacant, shining malevolently in the hard gleam of the sun. What he expected was death, another death, the dog's remains dribbled like ragout up and down the line — and what was he going to tell Meg? — but that wasn't what he found. The dog was there, intact, remnant chain and all, sitting on its rump on the far side of the tracks and staring at him stupidly across the void.

"Taffy", he called, trying to control his voice, the edge of hysteria there, of fury. "Come!"

But Taffy didn't come. Taffy never budged, except to contort himself (he was a male, Riley saw now, the sheath of the organ, the tight dark balls like damson plums) so he could reach up and scratch his chin with one back paw. Riley looked up and down the tracks, a long taper-

ing V to the vanishing point in either direction, then called again, again without response. *Maybe if I turn my back on him*, he thought. Or maybe — and here he felt embarrassed with himself, because what was he now, a dog whisperer? — maybe he should just say f*ck the whole business. Let the dog take his chances. Right. Fine. He swung abruptly round and made his way through the damp grass to mount the porch of the dead man's house and see if he could find the means to make himself a cup of coffee.

He wasn't really tracking the time, but it must have been around noon or so, the sun high overhead and the dog frisking back and forth across the lawn, chain in tow, when he looked up from his coffee and toast and his eyes came to rest on the canoe where it lay overturned on the dock. He'd been reading a very dull book, trying not to think beyond the next dull paragraph, wondering how he was going to get through the rest of the day, and there it was, this vision: the canoe. It was just the thing he needed — to get out on the river, clear his head, let nature be his guide. What could be better? The sun-spanked waves, the breeze fresh out of the north, a little exercise — he could always use the exercise, and really, how often did he have the opportunity to get out here on the Hudson, the river of his boyhood, of his connections, of his past, of *Lester*? All right. A plan. A definite plan.

It took him a while to find the paddles, secreted as they were in the back of the garage behind a six-foot-tall rusting metal cabinet that contained the other boating things: blue flotation cushion, orange life vest, various fishing rods, crab traps, gigs and landing nets. He took the cushion, a spinning rod and a tackle box stocked with Ted Marchant's lures — why not? — balanced a paddle over one shoulder and crossed the lawn to the dock. If he didn't bother with the life vest it was because he never bothered with life vests — he knew what he was doing, and even at his age (he would be 56 in December, though officially he admitted only to 50) he was a strong swimmer, had always been, and for a moment he saw himself in his 20s, racing Lester out to the raft on Kitchawank Lake over and over again, one sprint after the other, the loser having to swig a shot of the tequila their girlfriends, leaning over the edge of the raft, held out for them even as they laughed and cheered and kicked up a froth with their pretty, tanned feet.

The canoe — aluminum, indestructible — was surprisingly heavy, but he managed to flip it over, stow his gear and slide it into the water before lowering himself into it and equalising his weight. In the next moment he was stroking hard against the tug of the current, the first strokes the best, always the best, all the power gone to your shoulders and upper arms in a flush of resurgent joy. It was sensational. Transformative. Dip, rise, dip again. He must have been a hundred feet from shore when he realised he'd forgotten a hat, which would have been nice to have to keep the sun out of his face, and his water bottle too, but that wasn't a problem because he wasn't going to stay out that long. Cruise up the river and back again, 45 minutes, an hour. Max. Though, admittedly, he did feel a bit dehydrated and maybe hungover into the bargain, and the thought flickered in and out of his mind that he might paddle up the river to Garrison, to the bar there, and then drift back down when the tide reversed, but that was too ambitious . . . no, better to keep it simple.

Ahead of him on the right, just past the promontory where the last of the 12 houses sat, was a low trestle that gave onto the marsh on the far side, and he paddled for the entrance, thinking he'd do a little exploring. Meg had taken him back there the last time he'd visited and he remembered it as a magical place, alive with birds of every description, turtles stacked up like dinner plates on the butts of half-submerged trees — and, better yet, the sense of enclosure and privacy it held, as if you were miles away from anyone. The point, he realised, as he dug the paddle in and flew across the grey froth of the river, was that Lester was dead and he wasn't. He was alive, never more alive. The burden of grief was a burden we all carried. *Lester, Lester!* — but there was this too, this living in the moment, the sun-struck chop, the breeze, the scent of the wildflowers clustered round the mouth of the trestle till it could have been a bower in a Rosseth poem. He flew for it. But then, drawing closer, he saw that the tide was up higher than he'd realised — the space seemed barely adequate for the canoe itself to pass under, no more than three feet of vertical clearance, if that.

Riley, for better or worse — worse, actually — never backed down from a challenge, and once he'd made up his mind to shoot the entrance, he just kept going. At the last moment, he slid down supine on the floor of the canoe and let the inrushing current carry him, which wouldn't have been a problem if he'd arrived 15 minutes earlier, when he would have had another two or three inches between him and the concrete belly of the trestle. As it was, he could have glided right through if he'd been in a kayak or riding a surfboard, but unfortunately the twin high points of the canoe, at bow and stern, struck the ceiling with a sound like grinding molars, the current dragging the canoe forward till finally, a dozen feet from the far side, it stuck fast.

He saw his predicament and experienced a moment of regret, but regret wasn't going to get him out of this, was it? The water was streaming in and soon it would engulf the entire space, right to the ceiling, or at least that had to be a possibility, didn't it? All right. No need to panic. He raised his arms and pushed hard against the concrete above him and the boat edged forward, scraping in protest. What he hadn't counted on — but he hadn't counted on anything, just acted, and acted stupidly, suicidally, really — was the unevenness of the structure, which, as it turned out, had subsided ever so imperceptibly on the far side, not that it was any of his business, but what, exactly, was wrong with the maintenance people on the New York Central line? Didn't they inspect these things?

Whether they did or not, the fact remained

that he was stuck. On his back. In a space that was like a coffin, with the tide rushing in and no more than a few spare inches of clearance between him and the cold grey lid above him that might or might not have been home to various spiders and biting insects and water snakes too, an example of which had just whipped past him in a display of muscular urgency. What else? The cold. The smell of mud, muck, the decay the river fostered and throve on, and all at once he was remembering the story his father had told him of the drowned woman in Annsville Creek whose corpse had floated to the surface in a twitching scrum of blue-claw crabs. This was serious. He was in trouble. He was going to drown, that was what was going to happen, and he could already see the headlines — AUTHOR DROWNS IN BOATING ACCIDENT — and the pre-packaged rudiments of his obituary: his books, his wives, the early promise, the bloated middle years, the prizes, the checks, survived by his loving wife. Minutes, that was all he had till the water started pouring in over the gunwales, but in that moment he could picture the newspaper account as clearly as if he were sitting at the big oak table in the kitchen at the farmhouse, the overhead lamp bright and his reading glasses clamped over the bridge of his nose.

He'd often wondered how he'd respond in a crisis, at the same time praying he'd never be obligated to find out (and how was it for Ted Marchant, protecting Nadine with the shield of his own body in the millisecond before the AK rounds split him open?). To this point, the closest he'd come was some 30 years ago in the company of Lester, both of them drunk on cheap scotch and saturated with the triumph of their selves and their wise ways and the hipness that cloaked and absolved them, when the lip of the dune they'd been sitting on gave way beneath them so that they were rudely plunged into the ice bath of San Francisco Bay, but — and here was the charm — wound up none the worse for it. So all right. The water was rising but he wasn't panicking — he was too humiliated for panic. He was just — concerned, that was all. And amused. Struck between the eyes with the force of his own stupidity — of all the millions of deaths that come raining down each and every day of our lives, how many involve ageing novelists trapped under train trestles in canoes?

We fear death because all we know is life, and once you're alive the safest bet is to stay that way. He knew that, subscribed to it as a principle, and it provided his motivation now. What if — experimentally — he were to tip the canoe ever so slightly, purposely letting the water in so he could gain another six inches to free himself and take his chances in the water before the air gave out? He could do that, but then his wallet would be soaked and his clothes ruined, yet what were wallets and clothes when he was so close to joining Lester and Ted Marchant in the Land of the Dead? Nothing, nothing at all. Still, he did take the time to wriggle out of his jacket, shirt, jeans and hiking boots and ball the whole business up in one hand as he pushed hard off the ceiling, found the surge of the water and squeezed into it . . . yes, and Jesus, it was freezing!

A lesser writer than Riley might have said something like "Time stood still", but that wasn't it at all, not even close. Time accelerated. One instant had him in the canoe, passively awaiting his death by drowning, and the next saw him flailing his way through cattails and muck, his shirt, shoes and jacket gone but his jeans — and wallet — still clutched sopping in one hand till he reached the high stony embankment some previous generation had erected here in the backwater to carry the locomotive freight. It wasn't easy, his feet battered, the stones slippery, a dense growth of briars and poison ivy impeding his way, but finally, too cold and wet and residually shaken even to curse, he was able to pull himself up by stages and emerge on the tracks, and so what if he was in his Joe Boxers and his shoes were missing? He was alive, alive all over again.

He didn't say a word to anyone, not the old man bobbing in his boat or the two women sitting in lawn chairs at the house across the way. He just limped up the tracks in his bare feet and wet underwear, and here was the dog to greet him, dashing by with its length of chain rapping at the rails, and of course it was inevitable that in the interval yet another train would come hurtling by to rake him with its tailwind, faces pressed to windows, a young girl waving — waving, for God's sake — and he, nothing else for it, waving back.

• • •

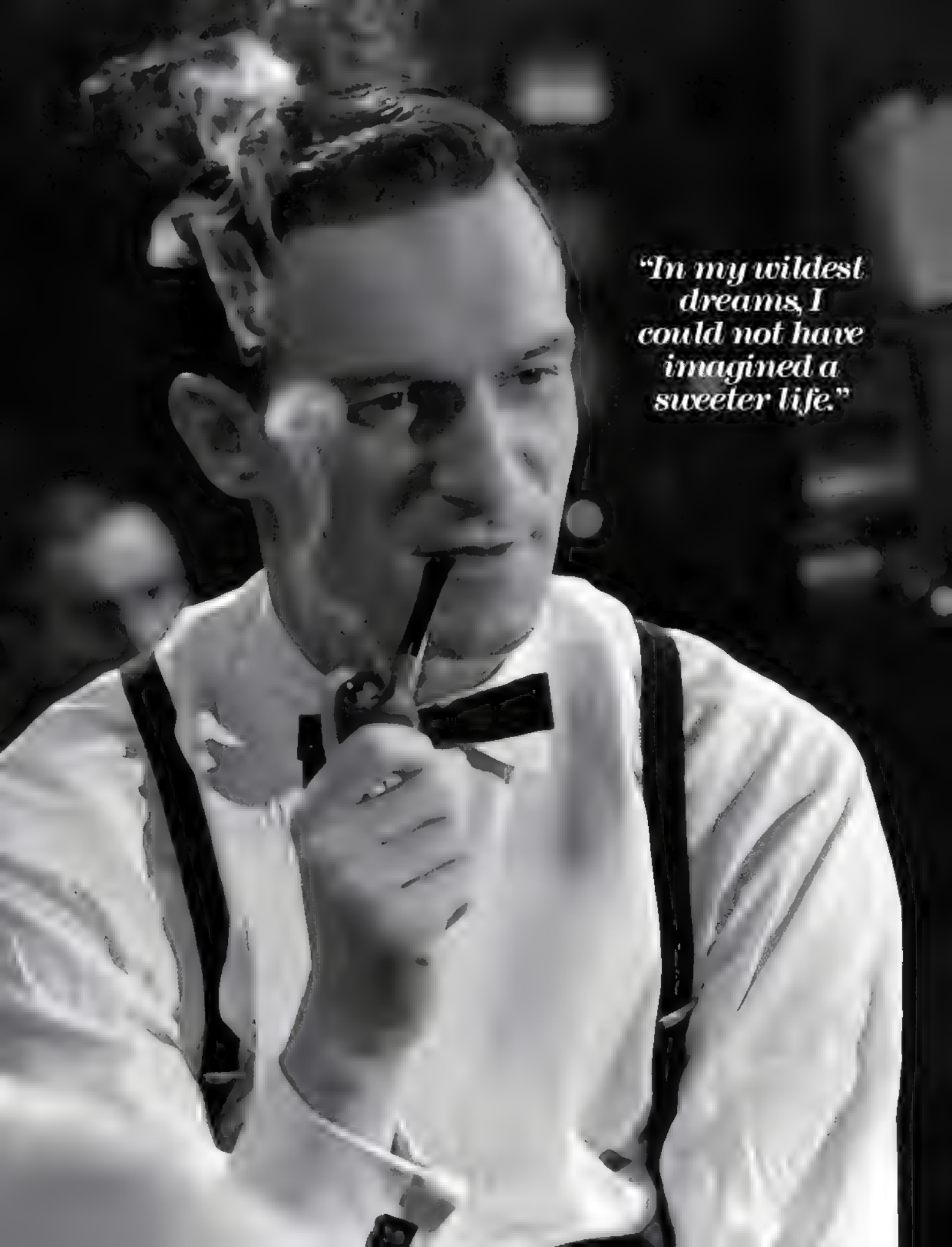
After the funeral, once everyone had exhausted their praise for the emotional intensity of his eulogy and the tears had dried and the drinks circulated, he bowed out early, pleading a headache. He and Caroline drove back to the rented house on the river, where the dog, its chain reinforced, twisted round and round the steel post Brian had pounded angrily into the ground just that morning, and they spent all of 10 minutes throwing their things together and bringing the suitcases down to the car. Then Riley locked up, gave the dog a wide berth and hurried across the lawn to leave the key under the mat at Meg and Brian's before they could get back from the reception or wake or whatever you wanted to call it. The tear-fest. The slog. The canoe had unwedged itself on the turn of the tide, but Riley hadn't been there to recover it. He didn't leave a note. If Nadine noticed it missing he'd send her a check, no problem, glad to do it, in fact, glad to help out, but no sense in worrying about that now.

Traffic was light and they made good time. Caroline was silent most of the way down, but her face was composed and she looked good — better than good — in the black velvet dress and single strand of pearls she'd worn for the funeral. They checked into the Algonquin, the only hotel where he really felt appreciated, a homey place, a *writer's* place, and while Caroline went down to see about theatre tickets he settled in a chair by the window, high above the crush and grab of West 44th Street. For a long while he gazed out into the greyness, then he picked up the dull book he'd been working his way through, found where he'd left off and started reading. ■

Linda Steadman

Text by JASON FLEETWOOD *Photography by* ARTHUR ST. JOHN

My name is Linda Steadman and I am immensely happy to join the Playmate community. I was born in San Jose California USA and grew up in Union City. For the majority of my life I've lived in California. Some of the best women come from Northern California. I'm college educated and I'm someone who is always up to learning something new. Some of the best people I know continue to teach me throughout life. I love a new adventure, if it's a speakeasy with a passcode to get in going backpacking without a plan through Europe, or visiting a new restaurant and trying the weirdest thing on the menu, I'm up for it. I take satisfaction in cooking, I'm always trying to create new dishes. I love music and singing and dancing even though I'm not musically talented, I try. I enjoy anything that works up a sweat: basketball, hiking, kayaking, wake-boarding, ATVing, and running. I take interest in golf even though I'm not the best. I'm an amazing caddy girl. I can appreciate great conversation. I adore seeing the beauty in life. I feel at peace most when I'm around nature. I enjoy traveling. It has always been a huge passion and a natural part of my life. When I was younger I developed a great interest in learning about people's habits and language. My favourite country is France. I'm very approachable and down to earth. I'm driven and believe if you think it you can manifest it. I love studying the mind and people. Partly because I love learning people's habits. I developed a general interest in psychology. Yes, I will drive you crazy or sane, however you wish to look at it, just kidding. My favourite type of shows are documentaries and mysteries and yes I do sometimes indulge in the reality trash TV. I'm always up for a good laugh.


"In my wildest dreams, I could not have imagined a sweeter life."

A MAN OF HIS TIME...

Two days before we closed the issue you hold in your hands, the word came in.

One minute we were hunched over mountains of page proofs. The next we were watching, dazed, as the news spread from our press office to media outlets and social feeds all over the world. Even in that first flush of grief, we knew we had to grit our teeth and get this issue to the printer. We had to continue to deliver on the vision of the man who, unbelievably, had just left us.

We'd like to think that Hef might appreciate the timing — that we're drafting this editorial in the heat of a deadline. After all, his all-nighters (fueled by Pepsi and Clark bars) were so frequent that his offices often doubled as bedrooms, and vice versa.

By now, countless worthy journalists have recited the long litany of Hef's accomplishments — and controversies — as a media titan, a civil rights activist and a bon vivant. There's more to his story than could fit in any biography, to say nothing of an editors' note, but we do want to offer one more thing.

When you remember Hugh M. Hefner, consider remembering him above all as a man of change.

Hef thrived on predicting the future and embracing the present, drawing through all the eras of his life a thread of elegance — and always bringing that ageless smile, which both beckoned and challenged. The same man who announced, in the introduction to this magazine's first-ever issue, that "affairs of state will be out of our province" would go on to run voluminous interviews with Martin Luther King Jr. and Ayn Rand, Jimmy Carter and Dick Cheney. The man who entered the magazine business when computers were still UNIVAC behemoths became a nimble social media personality, as adept at bantering with fans as he was at taking down trolls. The man who revolutionized the conversation around sex at a time when married couples often slept in separate beds went on to champion LGBTQ rights — long before "LGBTQ" had entered mainstream parlance.

For us, the only way to move through this sad moment is to keep fuelling that evolution — to continue to shine a light wherever the rights of the individual are threatened, to celebrate enterprise and original thinking and, of course, to serve as a gathering place for all who worship feminine beauty. Fortunately, we have another Hefner fighting that fight with us every day. Cooper, Hef's youngest son and our Chief Creative Officer, may bear an uncanny resemblance to his father around the time the latter started PLAYBOY, but the fact that they were never afraid to disagree — even if that disagreement took place on the record — shows that the ever-evolving Hefner DNA lives on.

Which brings us back to now. With the exception of a modest photo spread, the November issue remains the same one we spent the past two months putting together. We think you'll find that our mission to provoke, to delight and to advance the global conversation on sex only continues to grow. Soon, we will offer a special tribute edition in which you'll hear from some of PLAYBOY's greatest allies (none greater than our Playmates) and dig deep into Hef's photo archive, uncovering never-before-seen shots of this mercurial, magnificent man.

We hope you will stay with us. We have so much more to celebrate — and debate — together. And Hef will still be here, at the centre of the world of PLAYBOY. Smiling.

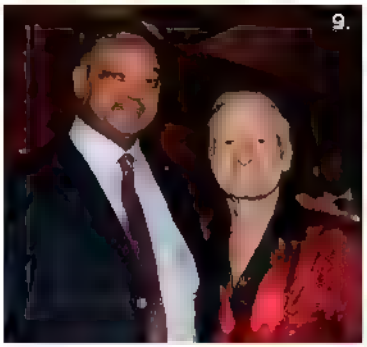
The Editors

...A MAN FOR ALL TIME

"It's the perfect
combination
of work and play
that keeps
you young."

HEFNER'S HOME

With his countless unforgettable parties, Hef showed us that a house is only as grand as the people who gather within



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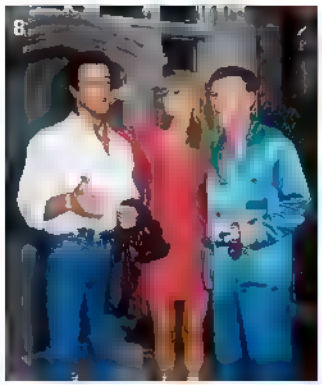
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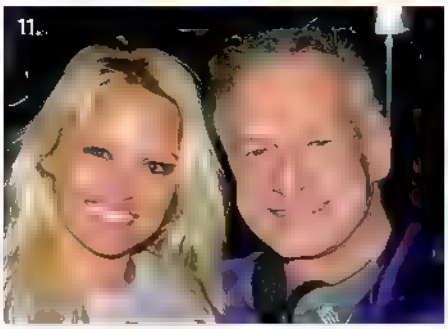
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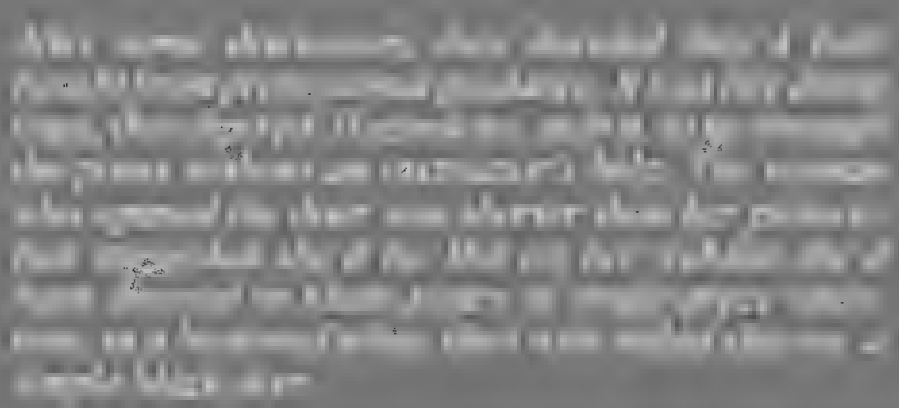
A vanilla husband wants to please his kinky wife. Can Mistress Ava help?



and calf-high boots so shiny Ken could see his blurred reflection, she looked less like a Mistress Ava Adamson than she did like a normal person, almost.

"Hello, Ken", she said. She took his hand in a predictably strong grip. Dark hair cupped her jaw, the tips curving under her chin like a gladiatorial helmet. She was roughly their age: still young, as opposed to young, period. "And you", she said, turning to Jenny, who was standing half a step behind him, her hand in his. "I'm so glad to see you. Come along."

She turned and left them. Still holding hands, they followed the dominatrix. Down the long hall, then they were in a dim room flashing mirrors and — contraptions. Everything was an elaborate variation on something else, something he understood. A black padded massage table, but sturdier, buckle restraints hanging from its corners. A cross, but X-shaped, also dangling restraints. At the end of the room, something like a throne, high-backed, theatrical, gilded, the centre of its seat cut away. Then what looked like a cat's scratching post, except that it was human-sized and, again, equipped with restraints. A mess of whips and crops, canes and paddles lined the walls. Jenny's grip on his hand had gone loose.

"May I take your coats?" the dominatrix said, smiling. Tattoos shimmered through the thin fabric of her shirt.

She'd be right back, she said. As soon as the door closed behind her, Jenny turned to him. Her eyes were wide and urgent. "The envelope", she whispered.

"Oh, right", he said, pulling it from his pocket. The website had instructed them to leave their payment — their "tribute", what the f*ck — out in plain sight at the start of their session. "Why are we whispering? Where am I supposed to put this?"

"Maybe on that — that table?"

He smoothed out the envelope and left it on the modified massage table. This woman was making more per hour than most bankers he knew. Jenny was hugging herself, looking down. She'd agonised that morning over what clothes she should wear, which was pretty funny, since, as he'd pointed out, she probably wasn't going to be in them very long. After five, six outfit changes, she'd ended up choosing the first thing she'd tried on, a slim wool dress with stockings, an ensemble at least 15 degrees too flimsy for the day. But now, underdressed, clutching herself, she looked tiny, miserable. He closed his arms around her, warming her up. He almost asked if she was all right, but maybe it was insensitive to imply there was any reason for her not to be all right, and why would there be? Here [illegible] in a dungeon in Chelsea. [illegible] dominatrix on her way. What could be off about this? So he kissed the top of her head, the white pure line of her part, and hoped the touch would say what needed to be said, whatever it was. He was so tired, he realised, of not knowing what he was supposed to do or say.

So much was his fault. Like a jackass, he'd pushed her and pushed her. A month ago, he'd interrupted the back massage he was giving her — "harder", she kept saying — to ask if there was anything else she wanted to try in bed. "Jenny?" he said, after a moment. It was possible she was asleep, but it was even more possible she was pretending this wasn't happening. They were like two thirds of a bad joke. He was an ex-Pentecostal, she was an ex-Catholic, and though she'd been with him for three years she still refused to let him in the bathroom if she was so much as taking a piss.

"Jenny", he repeated, running a knuckle up the long-knobbed curve of her neck. He was straddling her; she was lying on her stomach in her bra and panties.

"No, I'm fine", she said. "Thank you."

"Really, there's nothing?" he said. "Come on, there must be some fantasy you've never told me about. There's not even one other thing you want to try?" He'd brought this up as a joke, mostly, and also of course because he kind of wanted her to ask him what other fantasies he had, but now that she was being so evasive he had to wonder. Was she lying?

She twisted her neck to look up at him. "Ken", she said, too gently. "Are you bored?"

"No", he said. Quickly, before she had time to think, he said, "But you are."

Then came the denials, the expostulations, the what-the-hell-are-you-talking-abouts, and then, if only to prove him wrong, she pulled off his boxers and bounced on top of him for a long, athletic display of just how bored she was not. But after she'd fallen asleep, her head huddled under his chin, he lay awake, wondering.

A year married, three together. Say they had sex every three days, on average. Once every three days, 121.7 f*cks a year, so 365 times they'd played hide the salami, the same stick in the [illegible] the same hole, the stick in the hole, the stick in the hole, the stick in the [illegible] who wouldn't feel bored? The fact that he hadn't, yet, meant nothing. He was an outlier. Recently, he'd eaten the same deli pork-belly-and-pickle sandwich every weekday for a month, because it was good. Tasty, filling, reliable. Why mess around? Maybe he should make the straightforward effort and believe his wife when she said she was fine, but now that he was thinking about it he couldn't, not really. She was so kind to him that she couldn't be trusted.

Over the next couple of weeks, he brought up the question every now and then, teasing her, and though she brushed him off each time, he shouldn't have been as surprised as he was when, one night, she shook him awake. It couldn't have taken long — he slept lightly.

By R O KWON

fearfully, because anything could happen. He opened his eyes, and Jenny was sitting cross-legged, her hands folded in her lap. "Fine", she said. "If you really have to know. I think it's gone but it comes back."

"What?" he said, thinking she'd had a bad dream. It was only when he reached for her hands, her palms damp and electric, that he realised she was crying. "Jenny, what is it? What *comes* back?"

"There's something a little wrong with me", she said, each word enunciated, as if she were reciting a speech. "You're going to hate this. Sometimes I really need you to hurt me."

• • •

The door flung open. Ava swept in, chattering, something about how she'd just gotten back from a trip to Buenos Aires, she'd hitched a ride on a Peruvian cargo ship, it was her new favourite way to travel, then, "Ken", she said. "What do you do?"

"I work in finance", he said, after a moment, flustered. She was still looking at him, so he added, "I'm a Vice President at a fund. It's too boring to talk about." This last bit he said with a laugh — it was his usual sidestep, meant to prevent the blank look people got when he mentioned his job. *Oh, great, another overpaid bozo in finance.* It was a lie, though. It wasn't boring at all. He loved it, the numbers whizzing past, the rush of the transaction, the pure, exquisite logic of the math, all of it at his fingers and under his control.

The dominatrix let her eyes linger on Ken another long moment — it was stagy, her menace, she was an actress who'd said her lines too many times — then she nodded. Turning to his wife, she flashed a smile and said, "I really do love seeing couples. So often my clients are these lonely guys hiding from their wives. This is so much nicer. Jenny, I'd like you to get rid of your clothes."

So he'd been right. He got to think about that, how right he'd been, as Jenny slipped out of her dress. She stripped down to her panties, a little black cotton thong, but then she hesitated. Thumbs hooked in the waistband, she looked up at Ava. "That's fine", the dominatrix said. "Good. Now. Come here."

• • •

That first announcement of Jenny's had felt like a rehearsed speech, he'd realised, because it was a rehearsed speech, a set piece of pure bravado, nearly exhausting what she had to say. That night and over the next few days, he quizzed Jenny, and as she tried — halting, wincing, tearing up — to answer his questions, it was slow going. Jenny wanted. to be beaten. She wanted. rules — control — punishment — correction — pain. Ropes. Blindfolds. Whips. Not always, but in the, well, the bedroom, yeah. It could take her all exasperating evening long even to begin to answer a question as basic as, Exactly what kinds of rules do you want? They were both second-generation Americans — his parents had moved from Montreal, which counted — and though they shared the immigrant's scepticism of psychotherapy, it didn't take a shrink to guess why she was so shy: what with the nuns, the Catholic boarding schools, the subsequent renunciation of the Catholic schools, the shame, the counteracting feminism, her quasi-Victorian and entirely Korean squeamishness regarding anything having anything to do with the body, and all this heaped for decade upon decade on top of the great hungry beast of sexual desire — well.

Worse yet, he blundered from the start, asking her why she felt she needed to be hurt. "Why are people gay?" she shot back, suddenly un-shy. "Why does anyone have a foot fetish? One of my earlier memories is of looking up words related to — to this, in the dictionary. It just happens, you know?" No, he didn't know. That was the problem. His fantasies were confined to, oh, an occasional longing for a threesome. His memory of a certain sixth-grade teacher, the ponytailed Miss Berrymore. An un-indulged appetite for pigtails and, unoriginally enough, for Natalie Portman. "Is this — something you've done before?" he asked her.

"God, no", she said.

So — his idea — they turned to outside sources. Huddled together on their couch, they watched *Belle de Jour* and *Repulsion*. They watched *Secretary*, and they tried reading *Fifty Shades* but soon dropped it; it was so badly written that it made her laugh. Also, they studied a different book, a sort of how-to manual with diagrams, titled *Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns*. ("You don't like roses?" "Oh, I like roses.") After closing the book, after switching off the movie, he asked her what she'd liked about what they'd read or seen. ("Do you want us to get a cane?" Head nod for yes. "Do you... want to have mud thrown on you?" Head shake for no.) Just once, he asked why in three years she'd never told him any of this. "I don't want to be this way", she said, turning toward him her pale, determined face. "I'd rather not be this f*cked-up." By now, the right reply came automatically. "You're not f*cked-up."

• • •

The dominatrix had Jenny bent over the black table, her ass soaring upward. With quick, rhythmic slaps the dominatrix struck her well below her tailbone. "I'm warming her up", Ava explained to Ken, who resisted the juvenile urge to say he knew that already.

Mistress Ava Adamson was attractive enough, he supposed, in a sturdy way that wasn't his thing, but some guys would be into it, with her strong calves showcased by the short boots, the clusters of muscles sleek in the low light. Big breasts too, tucked

away in that no-nonsense shirt. The dominatrix was more muscular than he was, admittedly. He used to work out a lot more, then one day he caught himself fondling the flat planes of his abs and stopped, embarrassed. What was the point of all these muscles? It was the body of a thug, miscast in the life of a — fund manager. Brawn wouldn't maximise the possibility that he and Jenny would have long and happy lives, money would. He had no romantic illusions about money, but he understood its ability, so he went less often to the gym and spent those saved hours at the fund instead.

In one of the dungeon mirrors, he caught himself looking worried. The high flushed forehead settling into its first wrinkles, the disappearing hairline, his entire reflection these days a memento mori. He felt old, and tired. This was the thing about being an ex-Christian. Like that, your life expectancy went from eternity to 70-odd years. A death sentence on you and on those you loved. He tried not to think about it; he thought about it all the time.

"Up", the woman told his wife. Her ass was alarmingly red, and all she'd had was a so-called warm-up. "Jenny, turn around. Look at me. You know, don't you, that we're just getting started? And you can't do a thing about it. Scream if you like, and no one else will hear you. If you try to get away, Ken and I will stop you. You're not going anywhere."

Jenny looked — glassy, as if, Ava's threats to the contrary, she wasn't entirely here. "Are you okay, Jenny?" he said. "Is this what you want? Is there anything else we should be doing?"

She blinked a few times, and shook her head. "I'm all right", she said, the words sluggish. A glance at him, and back to the dominatrix.

"Poor little Jenny", Ava said, in singsong. "You're such a very submissive little girl, aren't you?" She spoke over her shoulder to Ken. "Your wife doesn't want to be asked what she wants. What she wants is to be told what to do."

"How do you know what she wants?"

"For one, because your wife told me so", she said. Ava had required a half-hour phone consultation with Jenny before the session. "Plus, you see how she can barely talk? She's so high on endorphins, they're scrambling her brain. It's beautiful to see." Smiling at him, Ava added, gently, "She's been like this her whole life. In all likelihood, she'll stay this way. People don't change."

Something inside of him flailed, upset. He hadn't even realised he'd been hoping that, somehow, all this would go away. That they'd have their little excursion into the foreign land in which he was expected to beat his wife, then they'd come back to their cosy, normal life in which they took care of each other. But the dominatrix was still talking. "Right now, she just wants to be good, isn't that right, Jenny?"

THE DOMINATRIX HAD JENNY BENT OVER THE TABLE, HER ASS UPWARD. "I'M WARMING HER UP."

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Of course, if he'd known what to expect, they wouldn't have had to come here. A week ago, he'd stolen out of the office early to get to stores before they closed. First to an equestrian shop on the Upper East Side that, according to Yelp, was the best in the city. He selected a few sturdy crops and whips. On second thought, he also picked out a zippered kelly green canvas bag, to hide his purchases. Next, he rode the subway downtown to a sex shop on Sixth Avenue, where he bought a gag, a blindfold and handcuffs. They sold whips there too, but he knew — from his research — that they would be badly made, too flimsy to be functional. One last stop at a hardware store for a length of rope, and he was back on the subway, going home.

Jenny called to say she was running late at the office. He waited in an armchair, drinking his Laphroaig and trying to read the *Journal* but failing, nervous, though he shouldn't have been. He had it all planned out. He was going to astound his wife. He was Mister F*cking Poppins, and when she walked through the door and he greeted her with the canvas bag, and she unzipped it and said, "Oh", and sat on the floor, like a kid, he figured, or, at least, he hoped, that everything was going to be all right.

She lifted her head, and her eyes were shining. "You're sweet to me", she said. He smiled at her. Then he frowned. Sweet, an adjective fit for puppies and, what, figs. Wasn't his role now to be mean?

Soon he had his wife trussed to the four posters of their bed, facedown, crops lined up at her side. "Jenny-girl, I'm — going to hit you", he announced, like an idiot. The back of her head, banded electric pink with the blindfold, nodded her assent. Shostakovich was playing, in case of neighbours. Her hair split away from her head like black wings, but he knew she didn't want to fly away, so he raised his hand and let it fall on her trouser-covered ass.

Things went well enough, as far as he could tell, at first. Per the instructions in *Screw the Roses*, he steadily increased the intensity of his blows. At some point, he started wielding the lightest of the three crops. He could feel the scotch, still, his aim was good.

Jenny wiggled, and cried out a little, but the knots held — he'd studied that too — and they'd agreed on a safe word, "red", if things got to be too much for her, and it was crazy, frankly it terrified him to hurt her, but it was like trying to speak in tongues for the first time when every other believing kid but him could do it, his father telling him all he had to do was loosen up, open his mouth and let God in, let God work, so he gave it a try, jumbling together consonants until he was yelling out something that sounded

about right, and since doubt was the work of the devil he kept going, telling himself that what sounded like squeals of pain were actually squeals of pleasure, and, in fact, he was starting to feel pretty good, getting into a rhythm, crop down, crop up, like Romeo-plus-a-whip, when she squeaked, "Red!"

"What is it?" he said, at her side, pulling up the blindfold. Her face was twisting with pain.

"You-hit-me-on-my-*tailbone*!" "What's wrong?" he said, desperate, fumbling with rope knots.

"What did I do?"

"Don't you know? It's unsafe", she said, wailing until he finally got her free.

• • •

So now Jenny was fastened onto the black table, bottom up. The heels of her feet were dry, haloed in white bits of skin. A strap. A flogger. A belt. A leather paddle. A crop. A Lochgelly tawse. A ruler. A wooden paddle. A Lexan paddle. ("What's Lexan?" he asked. "A kind of plastic", Ava said.) A rattan cane. A Lexan cane. This is how you hold it. This is how to strike from the wrist. Make sure to avoid her kidneys. ("Where, exactly, are her kidneys?" "Right here", she said. "And here.") Swing from the elbow. Now from the shoulder. Try her thighs. Yes, she's tender there. You can hit harder, if you like. That's it. Again from the shoulder. Don't mind her — it's good for her. She likes it. Isn't that right, little girl?

Jenny was yelping, her toes curling piteously into the soles of her feet. But no pleading, no safe word. Her ass was tingeing from red to blush, which worried him. At some of Jenny's screams, Ava tipped back her head and let loose a big laugh. He glanced at Ava, fascinated. The dominatrix wasn't faking it — she loved hurting his wife. Was he supposed to enjoy it too, and how much further was this going to go, and exactly how often did she want to be hurt, and if he couldn't keep beating her up, then what, and what about his needs?

With each instrument, after a few strokes, Ava handed it to him, guiding him. She ran long fingers over Jenny's skin, pressing marks and ridges, inspecting. He hesitated, and she urged him on. At some point, he noticed Jenny had soaked through the cotton, and there was a small puddle under her half-covered crotch. So this was why Ava had had Jenny keep her panties on. He hadn't even known that could happen outside of the porn film demimonde, let alone with his wife. They kept an economy-size bottle of lubricant in a bedside table because of how slow her body could be, sometimes, often, to respond to his.

Jenny was gulping, possibly hyperventilating. He stopped hitting her, but before he could get to her, Ava was there, bending down until her face was level with Jenny's, which lay flat to the side, her mouth open. She raised the blindfold and said, "Breathe."

SWING FROM THE ELBOW. NOW THE SHOULDER. TRY HER THIGHS. YES, SHE'S TENDER THERE. SHE LIKES IT.

Deep, long breaths. Breathe in. Breathe out. In. Out. That's a girl. I want you to keep doing that. Okay? You're all right. *Shh*. That's a very good girl. You're okay."

With each word her voice got lower and her face closer to Jenny's until her lips, almost whispering, were no more than another reassurance away from kissing his wife. Her dark hair swung forward, a curtain. Jenny inhaled and exhaled, visibly obedient. His prick, infuriatingly enough, was perking up, interested. Something about the two women, one little and Asian, one Amazonian, almost kissing. He'd have felt self-conscious, but hey, they weren't going to notice. Another few breaths, and Jenny said, "Okay. I think. I'm all right, Mistress."

Ava laughed again, the loudest yet. She stood and said, "Of course, you're all right. I wasn't asking you, I was telling you."

He was tired. His right shoulder hurt. He didn't want to hit Jenny anymore — he wanted to get out of here. He wanted to untie her and take her home, soothe her and have sex with her, his wife, whom he loved. But he kept going. Finish the session, he told himself. He got through the next round of implements, through Ava's jerking Jenny's head up by a handful of hair and informing her it was a lucky thing her husband was so nice to her. "If you were mine", she said, "I'd string you up by your toes." She got out a paper-wrapped package of jagged plants — stinging nettles, she said — and next he got through seeing her stick the stems into Jenny. Now there were nettles sprouting from his wife's ass, then came Jenny's gleeful screams, and Ava's laughter, and which of the two was crazier, he didn't know, but because he was finishing the session he got through that too.

• • •

On Ava's recommendation, Ken and Jenny stopped at a pharmacy on the way home and picked up arnica gel, a homoeopathic treatment that was supposed to reduce bruising. Once they were home, Jenny rolled off her stockings, wincing as the elastic rode over her skin. Then she grinned — she was in such a good mood. When she asked him to help her put the arnica on, he sat on the couch and she crawled over him, positioning her ass over his lap. He smoothed the gel over the discoloured, swollen mass of her, and she sighed.

He was applying the gel to her thighs when it occurred to him that she was in a classic spanking position. If Ava were in his place she would give Jenny a few more smacks, now, for fun, to hurt her just when she thought she was safe. Ken raised his hand. From behind, his wife was unrecognisable. He raised his hand higher, then he put his hand back down to the couch.

"Up you go", he said, and she thanked him, patting his thigh as she pushed herself off his lap. She stood, stretching, and she moved away from him. ■

VICTOR KERLOW

By **DANIELLE BACHER**

Photography by **MILLICENT HAILES**

Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! debuted a decade ago. What do its creators make of the fact that the US President may as well be one of the show's grotesquely comical characters?

"Someone give me a goddamn belt! My pants keep falling off!"

Tim Heidecker kicks off a pair of Kenneth Cole slacks and crosses the floor in black boxer briefs and matching socks, jiggling his belly to the AM classic "Rich Girl" blaring from the next room. Meanwhile, Eric Wareheim is shaving his face with an electric razor, fashioning a luxurious moustache. There's no air-conditioning in this downtown Los Angeles loft, and sweat glistens across his brow. Peeling off an XL T-shirt — he stands an ursine six-and-a-half-feet tall — Wareheim exposes his richly carpeted chest. "Damn, I look good", he says to the mirror as he adjusts a pair of aviators.

These two aren't quite household names, but they've spent the past 13 years carving out an unmistakable and ever-growing niche in the pop-culture landscape. They're currently at work on the second season of their horror-comedy anthology *Tim & Eric's Bedtime Stories*. Heidecker also heads up the Adult Swim series *Decker* (think *24* on a public-access budget), as well as *On Cinema*, and Wareheim has reached new heights of visibility playing Aziz Ansari's best friend on the Netflix series *Master of None*. But as a unit, they're best known for *Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!*, whose 10th anniversary they're commemorating with a live tour. Spanning five seasons, *Awesome Show* delivered lo-fi production, gross anatomy and frenetic non-sequiturs in 11-minute doses. Some of the more memorable sequences include a holiday episode in which both men unexpectedly start lactating (they proceed to hand out bottles of their "man milk" as gifts), a scene featuring a pubi-chair milkshake, which Heidecker drinks in the hopes of growing an epic "pube mound", and a series of ads in which a mangy-bearded Wareheim hawks live child clowns.

The creative process behind retina scorchers like these was surprisingly mundane. During the show's run, Heidecker and Wareheim would meet up in LA restaurants to eat BLTs and discuss forthcoming episodes. No matter how surreal (or gross) the finished product, most of their ideas came from scanning their environment.

"I'll be driving and think, Ah, Lamborghini. What can we do with that?" says Heidecker. "It's a very layered process. We go out and make a lot of raw material that doesn't become what it is until it's edited and put together." Wareheim agrees, adding that he "loves to f*ck with people — not as a mean thing but to entertain ourselves".

Heidecker insists he has always rejected the idea of "anti-comedy". Despite material that strays far from the traditional setup-to-punchline framework, their goal is not to alienate or unnerve audiences, the way Andy Kaufman did in his heydey by reading *The Great Gatsby* onstage; they simply want to make people, themselves included, laugh. Nor is their comedy meant to appeal only to stoned hipsters. In fact, many would be surprised to learn they actually create their comedy while sober. "I thought it was cheating when I was high or tripping. I don't consider that as coming from me", says Wareheim. "When it came to what made me laugh, it was a realness and the man on the street who wasn't an actor doing something weird. We do what we love and love what we do, but we have to be razor-sharp. To act weird is a lot of work."

The two concede that not everyone comprehends their absurdity, stoned or not. "I met a guy the other day who told me he got a divorce because of us", says Heidecker, giggling. "He said, 'My wife always hated you guys and she just couldn't get it.' But it's just a comedy show!"

"Sara Smile" begins in the background, and Heidecker sighs. It's possible he has hit his quota of Hall & Oates for the day. Now Wareheim is prancing around in his underwear, caressing his throat in slow motion. "Let's do this!" he yells to the crew. A wardrobe team surrounds Heidecker, guiding him into a baby blue Byblos suit.

"Awesome Show is definitely deep in our hearts", Wareheim says. "We were making the same exact thing in college. We were outsiders even back then. We didn't like anyone in our Film 101 class." He pauses, rethinking. "Well, it's not that we didn't like them", he says, laughing. "We didn't respect them. We knew we could eventually make something better."

• • •

Now 41 years old, Heidecker and Wareheim met at Temple University in Philadelphia as freshmen in 1994. On their first day, they swapped inappropriate stories to make each other laugh, causing a disruption in the auditorium. "We immediately got in trouble and had to see the teacher after class", recalls Wareheim. "We were bad and got yelled at — in college. Then we ended up in the same dorm as all the basketball players. So it was one big jock party, and then us."

Heidecker adds, "They were like, 'Where is all the pot smoke coming from?'"

The first video assignment they did together was a bit called "Find That Chicken". "Even then there was a lot of *Tim and Eric* in it", says Heidecker. "It was this stupid thing with a British phone booth, and I was wearing a full chicken suit. It was the dumbest thing ever, but we knew we would be making so many more projects." Eventually they decided to launch a website, TimandEric.com, expanding their catalogue of strange and transgressive humour.

After college, Wareheim began shooting videos for weddings and Jewish events in Pennsylvania, and Heidecker took an office job in Manhattan. In 2002, they packaged a selection of shorts and sent it to Robert Smigel, Dan Harmon, Rob Schrab and other comics they admired. The first to respond was Bob Odenkirk, co-creator of HBO's seminal sketch series *Mr. Show*. (Nowadays, Odenkirk is best known as the title character on *Better Call Saul*.) To Odenkirk's surprise, the two upstarts had included glossy headshots, a letter on proper stationery, DVDs — and an invoice.

"At first I thought I should throw it in the garbage, which I would usually do", says Odenkirk. "But then I was like, What the hell? I opened it, and alongside was this itemised bill for the postage, tapes, dubbing and editing. It was ridiculous and wonderfully executed, so I thought these guys were probably funny. I watched it, and I remember thinking it was inventive and very different, some semi-animated and music-video stuff, but it all came from this comical mix. If you like their voice, it was unique and rare."

But as Odenkirk, their eventual Executive Producer, admits, not everyone understood the humour — and maybe the humour didn't quite understand itself yet. They learned this the hard way when they launched their first show together on Adult Swim, *Tom Goes to the Mayor*. "It didn't work very well. I certainly knew it was funny, but I also knew what would become *Awesome Show* would work better", Odenkirk says. "They did whatever the hell they wanted to do. There were no rules to Awesome Show."

> **"We have to be razor-sharp. To act weird is a lot of work."**

Odenkirk offered creative input, but Heidecker and Wareheim often delivered their own skewed version of what he'd pitched. "It was their own voice", Odenkirk says. "They are self-starters in every way. They didn't need me. I'm just the biggest fan, that's all."

He continues, "Their influence was clearly massive, though. They even influenced *Saturday Night Live* to the point where they have two or three pieces that look like — well, you can almost call them rip-offs. That's a pretty big deal."

Indeed, SNL aired a 2010 sketch with Kristen Wiig and Amy Poehler titled "Ladies Who Lunch", in which a gaggle of socialites try to one-up each other with smaller and smaller hats. It bears distinct similarities to "Tiny Hats" (a commercial parody about an auto parts store that sells very small hats), which had aired on *Awesome Show* years earlier. In March 2016, the good folks at Cheez-It Baked Snack Crackers uploaded a Facebook video that resembles a sequence

from season four of *Awesome Show* (In both cases a man has his "mind blown" with the help of some lo-fi visual effects.) Fans cried foul, and Kellogg's pulled the ad — but not before it had garnered nearly 4 million views. Heidecker weighed in via Splitsider, saying, in part, "Pretty straightforward rip, and I hope Turner's legal department digs into this and helps protect our 'intellectual' property!"

The two have infiltrated mainstream entertainment more directly through their commercial and video work. A campaign with Old Spice starring Terry Crews and another with Loctite adhesive (who could forget that notorious Super Bowl XLIX ad?), along with music videos for acts including Depeche Mode, Maroon 5 and Major Lazer — all constitute a stealth infiltration, a steady creep of DIY weirdness onto prime-time TV.

"It's extremely difficult to do what they do and make it work", notes Odenkirk. "At first it just seems like absurdity and a kind of studied editorial clumsiness or visual crudeness being played with. But the truth is, what makes their presentation work is an instinctual awareness of how to play the moment. You can't copy it. Only they can do it."

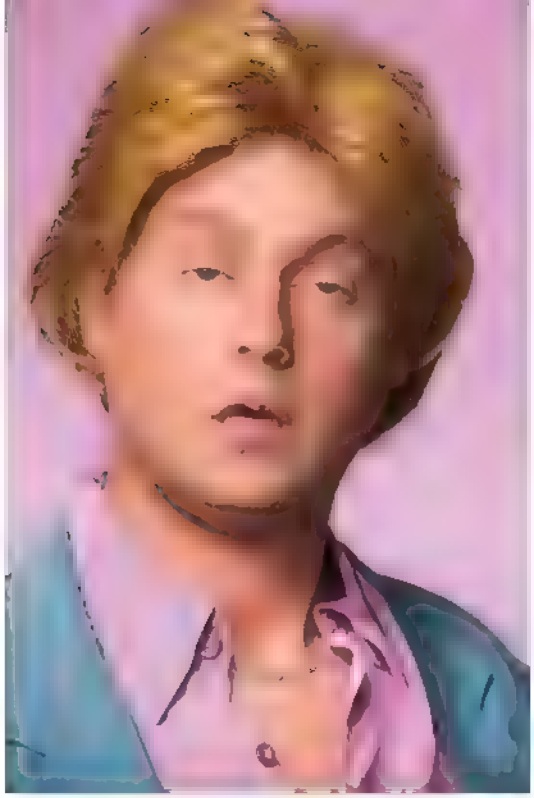
• • •

A week before their Playboy shoot, Heidecker and Wareheim are sipping cran-raspberry LaCroix at the Glendale office of Abso Lutely Productions. They founded the company in 2006, toward the end of *Tom Goes to the Mayor's* run, because they'd had a bad experience with the company they'd been working with and wanted complete creative control. They even own a sound studio across the street from the headquarters, where they film many of their sketches.

On a coffee table is a copy of *Paper* magazine's winter 2014 issue with Kim Kardashian ass-naked on the cover. (Heidecker and Wareheim, flaunting Tammy Faye–level drag, appear in a beauty feature in that issue.) Beneath that is a copy of their quasi-Scientologist self-help book, *Tim & Eric's Zone Theory: 7 Easy Steps to Achieve a Perfect Life*. They can't decide if they wrote the book together or not. They tell me it's unreadable.

Inevitably the conversation turns to the US President. "I've been pleasantly surprised by him", says Heidecker, laughing. He was part of the "30 Days, 50 Songs" campaign, contributing "Trump's Pilot", which envisions Trump dying in an intentional plane crash. (Father John Misty later covered the song.) In addition to his 2016 solo album, *In Glendale*, Heidecker has written a handful of satirical songs about 45, with lyrics such as "And on Saturday night when Melania's a-fast asleep, I tiptoe to the only room where I really wanna be, and I crawl into that beautiful king-size bed and I snuggle between my true loves, Ivanka and Jared" and "Take me down to the bowels of Trump Tower … I'll be hell-bent to call that motherf*cker President".

It's no surprise that Trump has inspired the two comedians. "He's a *Tim and Eric* character, and he has been for years", Heidecker says. And he's right. The baffling hair, uneven skin tones, lowbrow speech patterns, ill-fitting attire and befuddled arrogance — all these are qualities Heidecker and Wareheim visit time



"Trump's a disaster. But it's the funniest thing every time he talks."

and again in their work. It says something about the rele-

vance of Awesome Show that the President of the United States makes it look a lot less hyperbolic than it would otherwise.

"I mean, it's horrible", Heidecker says about Trump. "He's a disaster for America, our future, our children, everything and everybody. But it's the funniest thing every time he talks."

• • •

The political climate comes up again when the two are asked to name one thing they can't live without.

"Sean Spicer", Wareheim shouts.

"My pre-teen sex dungeon", Heidecker says.

"Now you have to say, 'Just kidding'. I heard myself saying, 'Don't say anything about my pre-teen sex dungeon'. There's a conspiracy theory that globalists are running sex dungeons. It's called Pizzagate. Look it up."

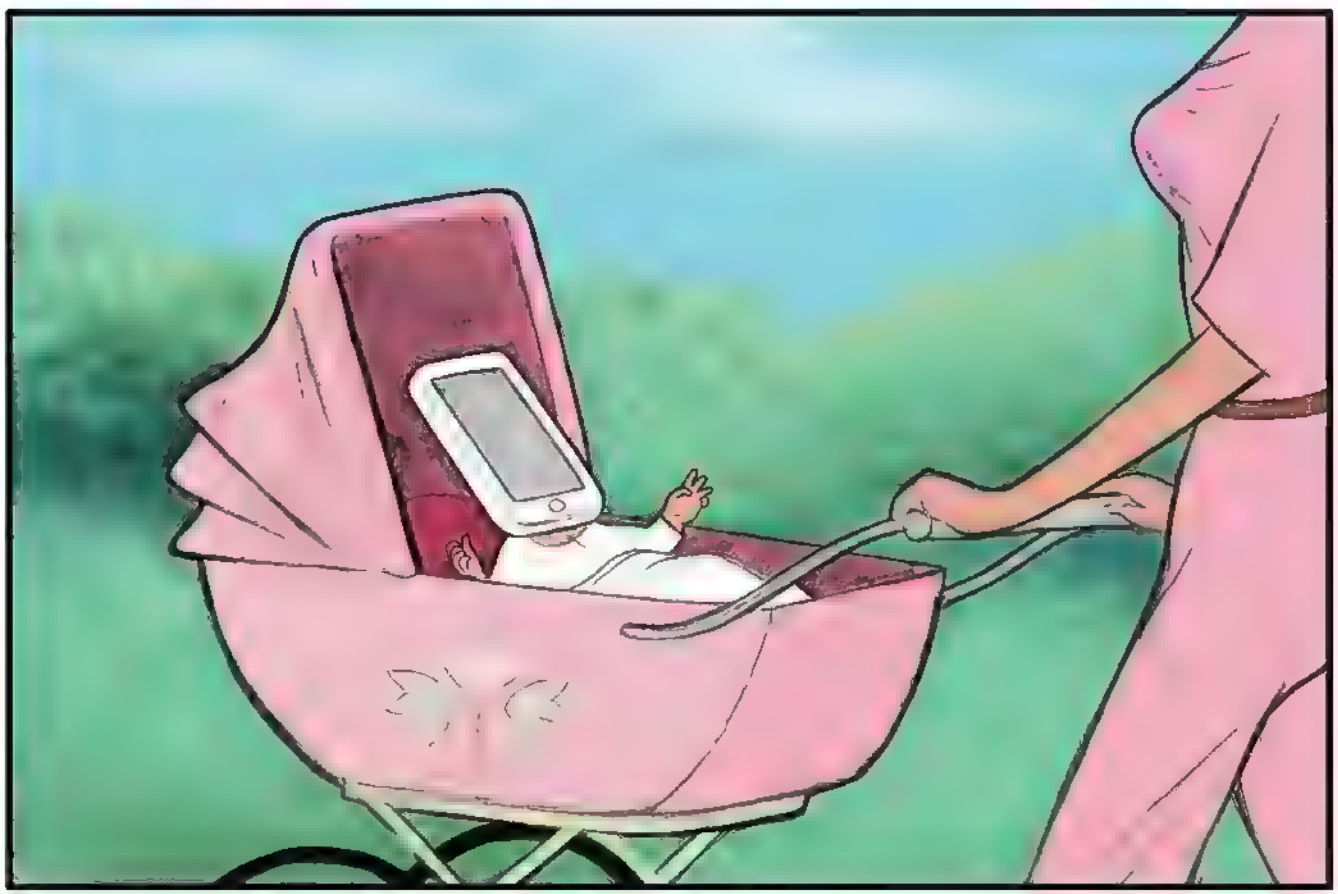
They look at each other and laugh. You can tell they have a rare bond. When Wareheim was younger, he was awkward. He was over six feet tall by the age of 11, always felt self-conscious and never had a girlfriend. After meeting Heidecker, he came to realise he shouldn't care what other people think. These days, he understands the insecurity and awkwardness and tries to use them to fuel his creativity. But no matter how mature or successful Wareheim and Heidecker become, the insecurity and awkwardness offer themselves up in spades. Heidecker admits he has a fear of death. "I was stabbed in my back by someone I know, and I didn't immediately feel it", he says. "I fear the moment of death, something we're all going to experience at some point." Wareheim has a fear of illness, and sometimes his dark thoughts take over. He believes he may have cancer. He doesn't actually have it, but he fears it. He thinks he'll eventually get something debilitating and lose his mind. "That shit is crazy", he concludes.

That jittery muse has led to some extreme methods of achieving their vision. Sometimes while taping *Awesome Show* the two had trouble telling the actors and amateur talent what they wanted them to do, so they would bark orders into a microphone from another room. This was partially because what they were asking was ridiculous and partially because they wanted the performers to have no idea what was going on so they could capture an honest moment. It wasn't a prank, though some clearly felt it was.

In one instance, Steve Schirripa, aka Bobby Bacala from *The Sopranos*, was doing a commercial spoof called "My Eggs", about a pill that allows users to produce eggs out of their behinds. Schirripa had to sit on a toilet and pretend he was... using it. He had no idea going in that he would have to pull down his pants in front of an entire crew. On top of that, he had to say "*Capisce*?" "He just looks at me with this 'F*ck no' look on his face", says Heidecker. "I felt bad. You can sense in the spot that there's depression and disappointment there." Wareheim adds, "But a lead on *The Sopranos* was sitting on a toilet, fake shitting. That's insane!"

Asked if they might ever revive the "intellectual" property that is *Awesome Show*, the two are vague. They suspect it would eventually become a parody of itself. "There are probably lots of notes I would give it now, but what's the point?" says Heidecker. "I'm not a very nostalgic person. I understand people who hate us. I get it. If you're not on the same page, you can quickly become disgusted with us. If you're not a fan, that's never going to get better. We just become more and more annoying."

"Yeah, you're always going to hate us", Wareheim says. "But, hey, I love us." ■



Crystal Maulde-Smith

Photography by JON MAPLE - DIGITAL TIGER STUDIOS *Text by* JASON FLEETWOOD

About me
I'm a super down to earth girl originally from the city of brotherly love Philadelphia, USA currently residing in New York I love animals sports and food I have always had the dream of becoming a model and traveling the world Playboy has certainly always been a goal of mine I come from a big family of four brothers and one sister and I'm the youngest So needless to say that dating was hard growing up and I never got any easier as I got older I'm a perfect world I'd be a Playboy Playmate of the year living in a house full of puppies and Christian Louboutin heels I'm a big city girl with big dreams

My hobbies and interests
I love horseback riding snowmobiling romantic dinners and bonfires by the ocean

My goals and career ambitions
I aspire to become the best I can at everything I do I like to make a difference and inspire young girls to be even themselves and believe they can achieve all their hopes and dreams

Who inspires me
The everyday person who works hard to achieve their hopes and dreams

My favourite quote
I don't mind living in a man's world as long as I can be a woman in it

Turn on
An intelligent funny guy who's a gentleman

Turn off
A condescending rude man

The perfect date
Whisky steak and a good cigar bar

My girl crush
Megan Fox

My favourite food
Filet mignon and mac and cheese

My biggest fear
Sharks and snakes

One destination I'd love to visit
Egypt

I'm not embarrassed to say
I love being naked and beautiful women

Want to see more of Crystal? Then be sure to follow her on Instagram @crystalmaude on Facebook at Crystal Maude, on Twitter @smith_crystal7 or visit her website at crystalmaudesmith.com

Bra 34DD
Waist 61cm
Hips 86cm
Height 1.7m
Weight 57kg
Eye Colour Green

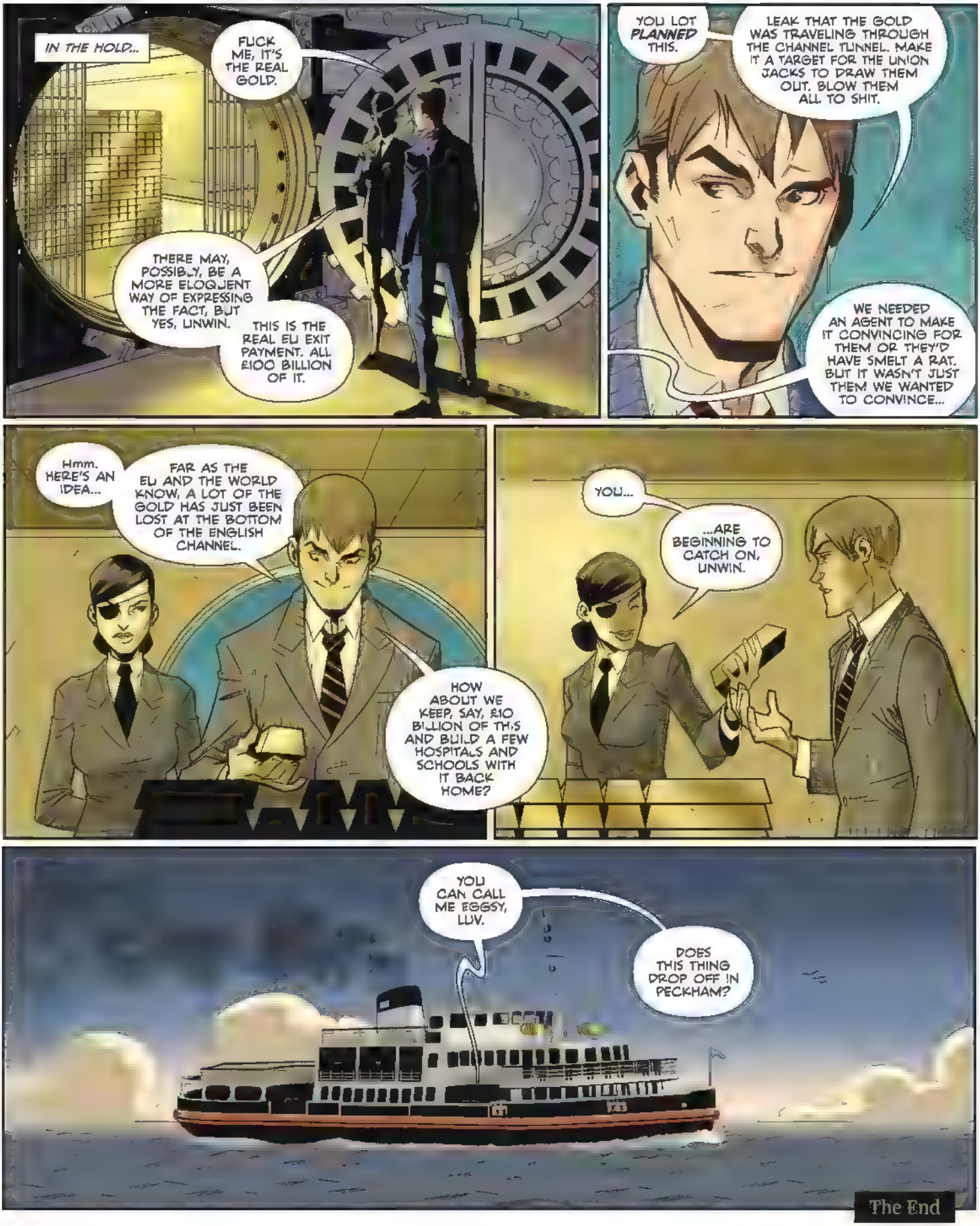
Kingsman
THE BIG EXIT
We join superspy Eggsy on his latest mission for Britain's top-secret agency
I DREAM OF PECKHAM.
AND EVEN THEN IT'S STILL A BIT OF A SHIT HOLE.
STORY BY
Rob Williams
ART BY
Özgür Yildirim
:-: U'gh--
FELL ASLEEP.
BIT OF DROOL
SOD BREXIT EXIT FURY!
BRUSSELS
£100 BILLION EXIT BILL TO PAY
OH YEAH.
I'M IN THE CHANNEL TUNNEL.
EURO
"BRITAIN'S LEAVING THE EUROPEAN UNION, SO GO TO BRUSSELS," THEY SAY
"GUARD THE £100 BILLION WE'VE GOT TO PAY THE EU AS AN EXIT FEE," THEY SAY.
"MAKE SURE NO ONE NICKS IT," THEY SAY.
"DON'T FORGET TO WEAR THE AQUALUNG," THEY SAY...
...
THAT BIT WAS A BIT WEIRD

I AIN'T WEARING NO FUCKING AQUALUNG, BRUV.
NOT WITH THIS BLAZER.
THUNK
UH-OH.
TIME TO BE A SECRET AGENT
YOU ARE HAVING A LAUGH..
ALORS, MON AMIS! WE ARE, 'OW YOU SAY, DISCOVERED!
ZEY KNOW!
ZEY KNOW ZAT THE UNION HAVE COME TO, 'OW YOU SAY, STEAL LE GOLD!
JUST A BIT STEREOTYPICAL..
YOU LOT AIN'T FRENCH. YOU CAN'T BE WITH THAT ACCENT!
MON AMI! WE ASSURE YOU ZAT WE ARE VERY MUCH, 'OW YOU SAY...
LEAVE IT OUT, MATE. YOU SOUND LIKE GÉRARD DEPARDIEU HAD A STROKE.

GET 'IM, DAVE! DO 'IM! SMASH HIS FUCKING FACE IN!
KKKKKK
NOT FRENCH
LADS, GO!
GET THE FUCKING GOLD!
I KNEW IT! YOU BUNCHA STEROID-BOTHERERS SOUND LIKE YOU'RE FROM MARGATE!
YOU AIN'T FUCKING FRENCH!
THNNNKKKK!!!
NO, WE AIN'T FRENCH. THIS IS COVER, INNIT! WE NICK IT, THE FROGS GET THE BLAME. WE ARE--
THE UNION JACKS!
BRITAIN OR DEATH, MATE!
AND THERE IS NO WAY WE ARE HANDING OVER £100 BILLION TO THAT BUNCHA CHEESE-SNIFFING PIZZA-MAKERS!
UH, THAT MIGHT BE THE ITALIANS!
YOU'RE A BIT CONFUSED, DAVE.
N ALL SORTS OF WAYS.
WAKKKKKK!!
THAT'S IT, DAVE KEEP 'IM BUSY! CHUCK HIM OFF THE, 'OW YOU SAY, TRAIN!
WE'VE DONE IT, LADS! WE'VE GOT THE GOLD! WE'VE GOT £100 BILLION WORTH OF--

THE GOLD...
IT...
IT'S FAKE.
IT'S A BOMB.
ZUT ALORS!
BOOOOOOOOOM!!!
WHAT? IT BLEW UP! THE GOLD BLEW UP. DAVE BLEW UP! WHAT IN FUCK'S NAME IS GOING O--
RRRRRUUUUUUWWWBBBBLLLE
OH SHIT
THE TUNNEL ROOF.
FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!!
"ONE LAST THING BEFORE YOU GO, UNWIN..."

"DON'T FORGET TO WEAR THE AQUALUNG."
Ah--
MY LIFT'S TURNED UP.
UNWIN!
STAY THERE. WE'LL PICK YOU UP!
WHERE DO THEY THINK I'M GOING TO GO?
LE FAY.
WELL DONE, UNWIN. YOU PLAYED THAT RATHER EXPERTLY, I MUST SAY.
JUST ENOUGH FIGHT TO CONVINCE THEM THE TARGET WAS GENUINE. JUST ENOUGH INCOMPETENCE TO LET THEM HAVE IT.
--UH, CHEERS FOR THAT..


IN THE HOLD...
FUCK ME, IT'S THE REAL GOLD.
THERE MAY, POSSIBLY, BE A MORE ELOQUENT WAY OF EXPRESSING THE FACT, BUT YES, UNWIN.
THIS IS THE REAL EU EXIT PAYMENT. ALL £100 BILLION OF IT.
YOU LOT PLANNED THIS.
LEAK THAT THE GOLD WAS TRAVELING THROUGH THE CHANNEL TUNNEL. MAKE IT A TARGET FOR THE UNION JACKS TO DRAW THEM OUT. BLOW THEM ALL TO SHIT.
WE NEEDED AN AGENT TO MAKE IT CONVINCING FOR THEM OR THEY'D HAVE SMELT A RAT. BUT IT WASN'T JUST THEM WE WANTED TO CONVINCE...
Hmm. HERE'S AN IDEA...
FAR AS THE EU AND THE WORLD KNOW, A LOT OF THE GOLD HAS JUST BEEN LOST AT THE BOTTOM OF THE ENGLISH CHANNEL.
HOW ABOUT WE KEEP, SAY, £10 BILLION OF THIS AND BUILD A FEW HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS WITH IT BACK HOME?
YOU...
...ARE BEGINNING TO CATCH ON, UNWIN.
YOU CAN CALL ME EGGSY, LUV.
DOES THIS THING DROP OFF IN PECKHAM?
The End

ARIEL RAY

TODD VITTI *Booked by* FCTV PUBLIC RELATIONS
JASON FLEETWOOD

About me
Growing up in Kansas with not much to do really fine tunes your imagination would get the neighbourhood kids together and we would shoot a film with my camcorder from whatever movie was into at that time remember my punishment if got into trouble was no Grease for the day always wanted to create and do something with the camera whether was in front or behind guess just want a life where work is my passion Success and knowledge are important to me don't know what the meaning of life is exactly but think it has something to do with happiness am constantly on the journey of self improvement and evolving into what hope is a better version of me every day

My goals and career ambitions
Oh boy, have lots of goals and career ambitions and they all range in the creative fields but my main goal and dream is to be a successful actress Whenever 'm feeling down just imagine myself as a series regular on a popular TV show and my mood instantly changes its a good little trick use on myself its those life hacks that help you keep going also want to explore comedy study at UCB and it's a craft would like to develop more and see where it takes me 'm currently reading/ studying a book about screenwriting because have this idea for a screenplay that would like to bring to life A my main goals right now are for the bigger picture, so will keep studying and taking the steps necessary to get there

My hobbies and interests
get to do what love the things that make me happiest are creating something and watching it come to life find it fun having the image in your head then seeing it come to fruition Creative endeavours are really the exciting things in my life love fashion and music and to see and try new things Am always looking for my next adventure

Who inspires me
find inspiration in all sorts of people Most people meet have their own special quality that can find inspiration in But do have a few that sticks out to me like Elon Musk He sees something in his head and he makes it happen A visionary at its finest 'm guilty of having a great idea and doing nothing about it To keep the motivation alive especially on his scale of what he's doing is a true talent Others like Marilyn Monroe had this certain light about her that cherish She smiles and you want to smile too She took control of a room and lit up the world and her presence lives on now that's something grew up watching Lucille Ball She was so goofy and free She made it all look so fun She was a persistent strong woman When Hollywood told her "no" she kept going Lady Gaga also inspires me with her boldness She embraces and accepts who she is as think everyone should

My favourite quote
would rather commit seppuku than fail Elon Musk

Turn on
Love it when they can teach me about something don't know Oh, and he's got to make me laugh too

Turn off
Someone who doesn't respect my time or is a show-off

The perfect date
Spending the entire time laughing and contemplating life and when you finally look at your phone it's past your bedtime

My girl crush
Sharon Stone

My favourite food
It changes but 'm always happy with a bag of popcorn

My biggest fear
My biggest fear is not living up to my full potential looking back on your life and being like "Wow why didn't just try harder and do more That's so scary

One destination I'd love to visit
really want to go to Cuba right now 've been talking about it non-stop see the pictures and it looks like time stopped need to get there before it changes

I'm not embarrassed to say
This doesn't really embarrass me but feel like people would be embarrassed for me don't wash my hair that much just use lots of dry shampoo Oh and talk to myself everyone should try it think it's healthy

Want to see more of Arielle? Then follow her on Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat @thearielleray

PLAYBOY'S PARTY JOKES

Cook tofurkey if you want a Thanksgiving dinner without meat. Also, cook tofurkey if you want a Thanksgiving dinner without friends.

Sorry, Santa Claus cannot deliver adult toys. A roly-poly man wearing red velvet and riding on a sleigh with a sack of kids' trinkets is the quintessence of holiday joy, but a beardy old guy on a sled with a bag of Fleshlights is an all-points bulletin.

What do you call a group of eight men lined up with one slightly taller man in the middle? A men-orah.

According to a survey of office workers, 39 percent say they have hooked up at company holiday parties. Sociologists say this is due to a workplace phenomenon known as "alcohol."

Just keep in mind that hooking up at an office holiday party can lead to shame, regret, loss of employment — and also things that aren't totally worth it.

The 12 Days of Christmas" is a song about getting terrible gifts for 11 of the 12 days of Christmas.

Hey girl, are you a new high-efficiency dishwasher? Because you're so quiet it's hard to tell if you're turned on.

Christmas caroling is a beloved tradition. And Christmas Carol is your affectionate nickname for the co-worker you have sex with at the office party every year.

Him: The candy in your Advent calendar is awful, hon. Those are my birth control pills.

Some women say they start Tinder accounts because they want to make friends. Right — and guys watch porn to see if the plumber fixes the sink.

Yes, but tomorrow is the next day of the rest of your life — The Procrastinator's Creed.

Moist people aren't offended by the occasional typo.

Husband: Honey, my New Year's resolution is to stop neglecting you and start satisfying all your needs. Wife: That's nice, dear husband. So — what's your New Year's resolution? Wife: Well, I guess it's to stop f*cking the gardener.

Have you heard of the hot new all-dad band? They're called Panic at the Costco.

A guy posted on Facebook, "If anyone knows of any jobs of any kind — let me know." Several hours passed and no one had replied. Finally, a sympathetic friend chimed in: "I dunno… some people are dentists."

Ghosting: gost•ing | verb: (1) to cut off all communication in a relationship, (2) to angrily rattle chains in your ex's basement in the dead of the night.

Celebrity hall pass" is a fun synonym for "person who will never have sex with me."

Nine out of 10 doctors agree: Getting paid to endorse things is awesome.

Increased government surveillance of citizens has yielded one important piece of information: A lot of people are going to be about 10 minutes late to meet their friends.

Over the years, Chevrolet has feminised a number of its model names. There was the Chevelle, the Chevette … and of course the Chegina.

No thanks, Santa. We'd rather be naughty all year long and buy our own presents.

VERNON! I'M FALLING! OH SHIT I'M-
FRAAAAANK

Look!
catch it!

the first snowflake of the season!

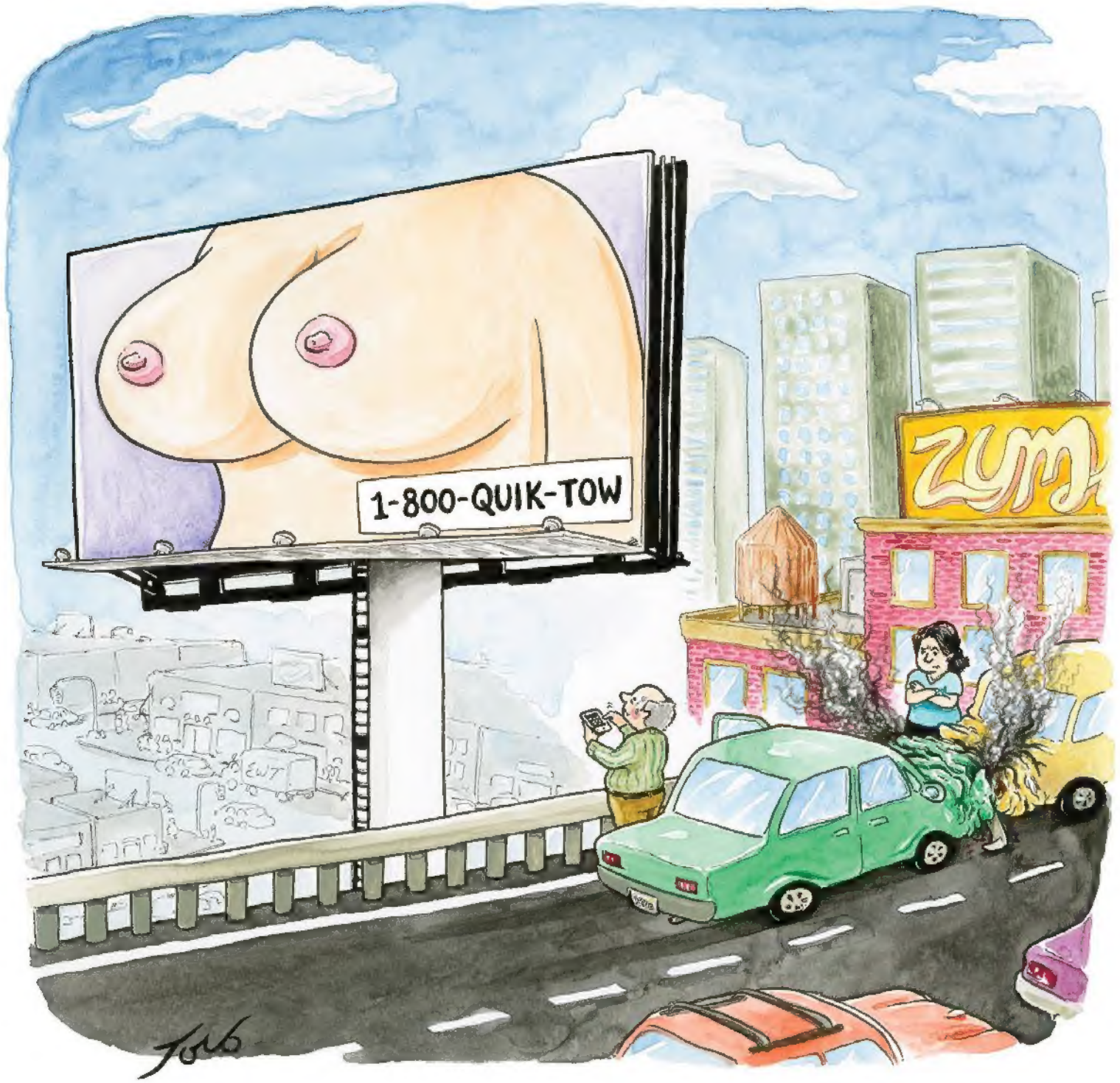
CHLOÉ KOVSKA

I've had a crush on Chloé Kovska's work since I first spotted it on Instagram a few years ago. That delightful riot of bubble butts, red devils and Playboy Rabbit Heads nestled deep into my brain, where my inner child waits impatiently for me to go senile. Kovska has the ability to reduce forms to the essential, paying tribute to the American tattoo traditionandGoldenAge comics and cartoonswhile adding her own primal twist. It's as though Tex Avery, Sailor Jerry and Robert Crumb got together and hosted an orgy at the Playboy Mansion. In her words, "I paint desires, urges, dreams, inspirations and memories with lovers, dressed up in cartoons." ¶ I learned that Kovska grew up in Melbourne, Australia, where her father taught her to paint. She has shown her artwork in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Miami, but she mostly keeps to herself, preferring that the details of her life remain obscure. She likes to use canvas or cardboard and acrylic paint, which dries more quickly than oil and keeps colors bright—all the better to bring her kinky, trippy pop cartoon visions to life. ¶ I contacted her to get a piece to hang above my desk and another to be tattooed on my arm. I have tried not to fall in love with her, but it's hard: Aside from her gifts as an artist, Kovska is as sweet and beautiful as you would imagine. Ultimately, I prefer to sit in the audience, like Avery's Big Bad Wolf, my eyes bursting out of my head at Chloé Kovska's pink panthers, gorgeous goddesses and red hot riding hoods.

—Jean André

Above Portrait of the artist **Opposite page** Inspired by '76. Acrylic and gesso on canvas. 18 x 14 inches. 2016.

Opposite page: Playtime. Acrylic and gesso on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2016. **Top left:** As Quiet as a Mouse.... Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 14 inches, 2014. **Top right:** Sex Wolf. Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2014. **Bottom centre:** Pink Panther and Little Dot. Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 20 inches, 2014.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